

European Platform against poverty and social exclusion

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the European Platform against poverty and social exclusion.

Parliament recalls that 116 million people in the EU are at risk of poverty and 42 million (8%) live 'in conditions of severe material deprivation and that the gap between rich and poor is continuing to widen as a result of the crisis. It recalls that the Europe 2020 Strategy has a target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty by 20 million which will still leave a large number of people in difficulty. Although this strategy seeks to ensure that a maximum of people will find work, the Parliament also points out that employment does not necessarily remove this risk as the number of working poor has grown considerably in recent years, with 8% of the working population living in poverty and 22% of those at risk of poverty holding jobs.

Participation: Parliament calls on the Commission to boost the involvement of organised civil society, of all stakeholders (such as NGOs, social economy organisations, service providers, experts in social innovation and the social partners) and of people living in poverty themselves. Parliament believes that synergies should involve all stakeholders, including SMEs and businesspeople. It calls for discussions with people living in poverty and social exclusion to be extended at national level, and for their participation.

Parliament also calls for the Platform against Poverty also to serve to bring together, at European level, those national organisations representing the groups at greatest risk of poverty which are not yet federated. The Commission should play a coordinating role and to guide the Member States in order to meet the current challenges and combat poverty and social exclusion, being mindful of the principle of subsidiarity.

Joint training and evaluation mechanism: Parliament calls for joint training measures to create a better awareness of the poverty phenomenon at all levels as well as the establishment of a regular, critical evaluation mechanism involving Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, based on precise indicators at national and European level, which will make it possible to evaluate the multiple dimensions of poverty and measure the Member States' progress. It calls on the Commission to assure the improvement of national and European indicators as regards the comparability of national statistics on poverty among vulnerable groups to track the number of people receiving less than 50% or 40%, respectively, of the median income, and to use this as a basis for conducting an annual evaluation of poverty situations in the EU. Parliament also calls for a detailed, up-to-date study of the number of people living in poverty and the number at risk of falling into poverty, to be carried out as a matter of urgency in the coming months and for a Commission annual report to Parliament on the Member States' progress in reducing poverty and social exclusion.

Horizontal social clause: Parliament calls on the Commission to take full account of the correct horizontal social clause as specified in Article 9 TFEU, under which the EU has to take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection and the fight against social exclusion. It calls for more in-depth social impact assessments of EU policies making it possible to avoid a levelling-down of social standards in Europe and facilitating the development of a common social basis in Europe.

Budget: Parliament calls on the Commission to identify more precisely the budget lines relevant to the Platform and the level of appropriations allocated to them, particularly as regards the ESF. It calls on the Commission to:

- set out its proposals for combating poverty and social exclusion in the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework;
- identify the financial support needed for agreed thematic priorities and provide increased funding for, European programmes which can contribute to various aspects of the fight against social exclusion, poverty and social and economic inequality, including health inequality (such as the research Framework Programme and the Progress programme).

Noting that in the draft budget 2012, the European Commission has estimated the increase for the European Platform against Poverty flagship initiative at 3.3 %, as compared to last year, Parliament regrets the lack of clarity and the overlapping of the different instruments and budgetary lines via which the Europe 2020 targets are to be achieved through the EU budget.

As regards the 2012 food distribution scheme for the most deprived people in the EU, Parliament contests the Commission's decision to review downwards, from EUR 500 million to EUR 113.5 million, the budget for the 2012 food distribution scheme for the most deprived people in the EU (the MDP scheme). It calls on the Commission and the Council to find a way to continue the MDP scheme for the last two years of the current funding period (2012 and 2013) and for the next funding period (2014-2020), giving it a legal basis that cannot be contested by the CJEU and maintaining the annual financial ceiling at EUR 500 million.

Basket of basic goods and services: Parliament calls on the Commission, in consultation with the European Central Bank, to propose common principles to define the 'basket of basic goods and services' required to enable everyone to live in dignity. It calls for the Platform to make it possible to map, as accurately as possible, the degree of access to these basic requirements (which vary according to the place and group concerned) under the various systems in place for the provision of assistance to the poor. In an oral amendment adopted in plenary, Parliament also invites the Council to include a section on Extreme poverty and fundamental rights in the thematic areas in the next multiannual framework of the Fundamental Rights Agency.

2008 recommendation: Parliament generally welcomes the Commission's announcement of a communication on the implementation of its 2008 recommendation concerning the active inclusion strategy. It calls for that communication to include, in particular, a timetable for implementing the strategy's three component strands, namely:

- sufficient income support: the Member States should recognise the individual's basic right to adequate resources and social assistance as part of a comprehensive and consistent drive to combat social exclusion;
- inclusive labour markets: the Member States should provide persons whose condition renders them fit for work with effective help to enter or re-enter, and stay in, employment that corresponds to their work capacity;
- access to quality services: the Member States should ensure that those concerned receive appropriate social support to facilitate their economic and social inclusion.

Homelessness: Parliament believes that the situation of the homeless calls for particular attention and the introduction of additional measures on the part of both the Member States and the Commission, with a view to ensuring their full integration by 2015.

Parliament calls on the Commission to:

- develop, as a matter of urgency, an EU homelessness strategy;
- draw up a detailed roadmap for the implementation of this strategy in the 2011-2020 period.

Housing: Parliament recommends that the Member States adopt a proactive policy on decent housing in order to ensure universal access to quality housing at affordable prices or on preferential terms of purchase. It calls for more attention to be paid to migrants, who are often exploited and forced to live in sub-standard housing. Members recommend that the Member States expand the supply of quality social housing and emergency housing in order to guarantee access for all, and in particular for the most disadvantaged, to decent, affordable housing. Considering that it costs society and the community more to rehouse people who have been evicted from their accommodation than it does to keep them there, Parliament recommends the implementation of policies to prevent evictions, in particular by the public authorities taking responsibility for payment of rents and rent arrears of persons threatened with eviction. It considers EU action in deprived neighbourhoods as a cost-efficient way to combat exclusion and reduce health expenditure, and calls on the Commission to step up such action under the next cohesion policy and other EU programmes. An increase in the ERDF budget for measures to improve energy efficiency in social housing in order to tackle energy poverty is also called for.

Decent work/the working poor: Parliament recalls that the increasing number of insecure employment contracts in most Member States is having the effect of exacerbating the segmentation of the labour market and reducing the protection afforded to the most vulnerable. The creation of new jobs must proceed in accordance with the basic principles laid down by the ILO, putting into practice the concept of decent work and quality jobs (including decent working conditions, the right to work, health and safety at work, social protection, and arrangements for worker representation and dialogue with employees) and applying the principles of equal pay for men and women and equal treatment for EU workers and third-country nationals legally resident in the EU.

Parliament takes the view that a comprehensive and effective way out of poverty can be found only if the necessary strengthening of social protection instruments is accompanied by significant reinforcement of education and training paths at every level. It supports the development of more inclusive education systems to tackle the problem of early school leaving and enable young people from disadvantaged social groups to reach a higher level of education.

Minimum income: Parliament wishes the Commission to launch a consultation on the possibility of a legislative initiative concerning a sensible minimum income which will allow economic growth, prevent poverty and serve as a basis for people to live in dignity. It wants the Commission to help Member States share best practice in relation to minimum income levels, and encourages Member States to develop minimum income schemes based on at least 60% of the median income in each Member State.

Parliament also asks for a series of specified measures to fight against poverty:

- migrants: the Commission and the Member States need to step up their cooperation with third countries in the field of education and culture, with a view to reducing poverty and social exclusion in such countries; it recommends introducing appropriate taxation of very high salaries in order to help fund social protection systems and the minimum wage and reduce income disparities
- people with disabilities: Parliament recommends that Member States develop new measures to help vulnerable and socially excluded groups, especially people with disabilities, and promote accessible environments for people with disabilities;
- women: noting that the gender aspect of poverty and social exclusion is completely ignored in the Platform, Members invite the Commission and the Member States to take the gender-specific perspective as a key component in all common policies and urge Member States, as part of measures to support employment - especially among women - through the reconciliation of work and family life, to facilitate access to quality and affordable care facilities; it calls on the Member States to improve the protection provided for employees who are unfit to carry on working as a result of illness, an accident at work or an industrial disease, to prevent their being reduced to financial insecurity;
- Roma: Parliament calls for Roma people, and the organisations that represent and work with them, to be actively involved in the drafting and implementation of the national Roma integration strategies up to 2020. It stresses that the inclusion and integration of Roma will require greater efforts in order to achieve their full inclusion - and put an end to the numerous forms of discrimination to which they are subject;
- children: Parliament calls for the fight against child poverty to focus on prevention through the provision of equal access to high-quality early childhood education and childcare services. It calls for financial support for services having proven their worth and for the systematic integration of policies designed to support poor families into all relevant areas of activity combining a universal approach with targeted measures for the most vulnerable families. It points out that thousands of children are separated from their parents as a result of their living conditions (lack of housing) or because their parents are living in severe poverty (material, social and cultural) and have not received the necessary support to help them fulfil their parental responsibilities;
- elderly people: Parliament maintains that elderly care programmes, including home care, must be developed and reviewed in all the Member States and adds that families caring for the elderly should also be provided with support (financial if possible). It stresses the importance of developing policy proposals at Member State level to tackle homelessness and drug and alcohol addiction and recommends an adequate minimum pension which allows the elderly to live in dignity.

Use of funding: Parliament acknowledges the need to assess, where possible, the effectiveness, impact, coordination and value for money of the use of EU funds - especially the European Social Fund (ESF) - in terms of achieving the poverty reduction target. It maintains that priority must be given to projects that combine employment targets and strategies with integrated active inclusion approaches, such as projects designed to strengthen intergenerational solidarity at regional and local level or which specifically contribute to gender equality and the active inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Other measures it suggests are as follows:

- the importance of effective action for solidarity, including reinforcement, anticipated transfers, and reductions in the Member States' share of cofinancing in respect of budgetary funding, so as to create decent jobs, support production sectors, fight poverty and social exclusion and avoid creating new forms of dependence;
- tackling poverty in urban and rural areas;
- strengthening the European Social Fund (the main instrument specifically intended to promote social inclusion);
- strengthening the Grundtvig programme;

- maintaining the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund beyond 2013.

Economic governance/European Semester: Parliament calls on the Member States to submit national reform programmes consistent with the aim of the Platform and with the Union's objectives of social and sustainable development, and, supporting the Commission's recognition that poverty 'is unacceptable in 21st-century Europe'.

It calls on the Commission to:

- develop country-specific recommendations with a view to meeting the poverty reduction target, especially in the event that those programmes are not successful;
- draw up guidelines at European level for the Member States so as to ensure that local authorities and other stakeholders participate effectively in the drafting of national reform programmes.

Parliament urges the Member States to agree to, and adopt as soon as possible, the [proposal for a Council directive](#) on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, by also taking account of social discrimination.

In Parliament's view, the Member States should aim to translate the targets relating to the reduction of social exclusion/poverty into ambitious national and regional targets, and should include a specific target relating to child poverty and specific strategies involving a multidimensional approach to child and family poverty.

Social economy: lastly, Parliament welcomes the Commission's desire to take greater account, through various initiatives, of the role of social economy actors (mutual societies, foundations and cooperatives) so that there are no more obstacles hindering them from making a full contribution, with legal certainty, to reducing poverty and social exclusion by proposing innovative and sustainable responses to citizens' needs. It is concerned, however, that no reference is made to the statute for a European association, given that the not-for-profit sector is a major actor in the fight against poverty. It stresses, furthermore, that the measures currently being proposed to promote the social economy, in particular associations and mutual societies, do not adequately reflect its potential contribution to the policy on combating poverty.

In parallel, it calls once again for sectorial legislative initiatives on the quality and accessibility of social services of general interest, in particular in the areas of health, education, public transport, energy, water and communication. However, it should be noted that the plenary rejected the idea of a framework directive on the quality and accessibility of social services of general interest, as well as the active support for quality and accessibility of basic social services, put forward by the committee responsible (Employment and Social Affairs).