Active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Jean LAMBERT (Greens/ALE, UK) on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market. The committee welcomes the fact that the Commission based its Recommendation 2008/867/EC on Recommendation 92/441/EEC which **recognises the individual's fundamental right to sufficient resources and assistance to live in human dignity** and defines common principles for implementing that right.

Overall, MEPs endorse the common principles and practical guidelines presented in Recommendation 2008/867/EC based on three pillars, namely: (i) adequate income support; (ii) inclusive labour markets; (iii) access to quality services. MEPs point out that any active inclusion strategy has to be built on the following principles:

- individual rights, respect for human dignity and the principles of non-discrimination, equality of opportunities and gender equality;
- the promotion of labour market integration combined with full participation in society;
- the realisation of the principles of quality, adequacy and accessibility across all three pillars.

MEPs agree with the Council that the implementation of Recommendation 92/441/EEC needs to be improved. Therefore, they consider that social assistance should provide an adequate minimum income for a dignified life, at least at a level which is above the "at risk of poverty" level.

Adequate income support: MEPs call on the Member States to implement adequate income support so as to fight poverty and social exclusion based on Recommendations 92/441/EEC and 2008/867/EC which must be adequate, transparent, accessible to all, and sustainable over time. They request the Council to agree an **EU target for minimum income schemes and contributory replacement income schemes** of providing income support of at least 60% of national median equalised income and, furthermore, to agree a timetable for achieving this target in all Member States.

Recognising that the interaction of social assistance and labour market activity is complex, MEPs urge the development of systems, which effectively support individuals in a period of transition rather than penalisings or discouraging them or removes assistance too rapidly when an individual takes up work. MEPs point to the importance of laying down welfare benefits for vulnerable persons in a position to work.

Minimum wage policy: MEPs suggest that the Member States actively consider a minimum wage policy in order to tackle the growing number of "working poor" and make work a viable prospect for those distant from the labour market. They believes that active inclusion necessitates the reduction of inequalities between regions and areas within the Community, through accelerated rehabilitation of the areas affected by the economic crisis and development of rural regions. MEPs also call on the Member States to take action to fight clandestine or 'submerged' employment.

Active inclusion policies (tailor-made measures): according to MEPs, active inclusion policies should:

- be consistent with a lifecycle approach to education, life-long learning, social and employment policies;
- be tailor made, targeted and needs-oriented;

- be based on an integrated approach and participative; and
- respect pre-conditions which are essential to allow participation without creating conditions that endanger a minimum living income.

MEPs invite the Commission to consider whole-cost accounting in the field of active and social inclusion as experience has shown that early investment and preventive action can reduce overall cost for society in the long term. They consider that the Member States should provide **targeted additional benefits for disadvantaged groups** (such as people with disabilities or chronic diseases, single parents, or households with many children) which cover extra costs in connection, inter alia, with personal support, the use of specific facilities and medical and social care, establishing inter alia affordable price levels for medicines for less advantaged social groups. They also stress the need to ensure decent invalidity and retirement pension levels. MEPs agree, especially in the light of people's often complex needs, that there is a need to design and implement tailor-made active inclusion measures that combine minimum

income, labour market inclusion and social services, that there must be a focus on early identification and preventive action, and that priority should be given to targeting the most vulnerable persons. Member States are called upon to support the empowerment of social NGOs in order to facilitate their participation in the formulation and implementation of inclusion policies.

MEPs call on the Member States to develop a more constructive approach to drugs policy with the emphasis on prevention, education and treatment for addiction rather than criminal sanctions. They also call for the de-stigmatisation of people with mental health problems and learning disabilities.

Preventative action: MEPs consider that, because problems associated with exclusion are in many cases present from the earliest years of life, preventive action is essential to identify from an early age those children and young people most at risk, well before they drop out of education and training. They consider that a broad stakeholder dialogue and support for preventive action and social services to improve the opportunities for vulnerable children and young adults are critical to the success of inclusion policies.

Accessible social services: MEPs call on the Member States to do more to address issues faced by carers, including the right to choose freely whether they want to be a carer and the extent of the care that they provide, the possibility of combining caring with paid work and employment as well as access to social security schemes and pensions, in order to avoid impoverishment as a consequence of caring. They welcome the recognition of the need for universal access to affordable and high-quality social services as a fundamental right and as an essential element of the European Social Model. They consider that such social services include stable, affordable housing, accessible public transport, basic vocational training, and healthcare provision as well as access to affordable energy and other network services; notes that progress must be made on guaranteeing universal service obligations in services of general interest. They note that progress remains inadequate in reaching the Barcelona targets set for affordable, high-quality childcare provision and the care needs for other dependants. MEPs encourage Member States to consider social default tariffs for vulnerable groups, for example in the fields of energy and public transport and also facilities for obtaining microcredits, so as to promote active inclusion, as well as free healthcare and education for people with difficulties of a material nature. Furthermore, MEPs call on the Member States to provide people with disabilities with the additional support necessary both in order to access the labour market and while working.

Overall, MEPs call on the Commission to examine without delay all possible means of clarifying the legal context in which social services general interest operate and providing them with a **legal framework** to serve as a point of reference.

Promoting education and training: MEPs call on the Commission and the Member States to provide adequate resources to facilitate access to life-long learning programmes. According to them, high-quality education is a vital prerequisite for successful future employment and integration. Member States are

asked to extend legislation on public education with a view to eliminating any and all barriers to education, ensuring integrated education and access for all. They believe that those who have been excluded from the labour market for a long time must have greater entitlements to funding for lifelong learning, especially where 'key competences' are concerned.

Other actions of active inclusion include tackling domestic violence and the abuse of children and older people, gender mainstreaming and combating discrimination.

MEPs note that there is a risk that more imaginative approaches to prepare those furthest from

the labour market for eventual access to it may be deprived of funding in favour of a more narrow approach based on easily quantifiable outcomes. The Commission is called upon to improve the funding for bottom-up approaches under Structural Funds.

Creating a more favourable labour market: MEPs point to the necessity of creating an inclusive labour market as the core of any active inclusion strategy, a labour market with decent working conditions and job diversity for all workers. MEPs call on the Member States to establish networks at regional and local levels to advise and refer people on where they can receive help in accessing the labour market as well as specific social services.

Promote the insertion of asylum-seekers: MEPs strongly believe that more should be done to tackle the barriers to inclusion faced by asylum seekers. Therefore, MEPs call on the Member States to work to end asylum seekers' dependence on benefits by allowing them to work and consider the development of more legal immigration routes. All Member States are urged to safeguard human rights-based asylum policies in accordance with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and other relevant human rights legislation. MEPs urge the Commission and the Member States to reject the misleading blurring of economic migration with asylum-seeking, and of economic migration and asylum-seeking with illegal immigration.

Poverty reduction: MEPs reiterate their request for setting an EU target to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2012 and to end street homelessness of children, youth and adults alike by 2015. They also call for a minimum level of income provided through pensions and for access to health care and for its quality (reducing infant mortality, improving health and increasing life expectancy, etc.).

Road map: lastly, MEPs call for a concrete roadmap for the implementation of active inclusion strategies based on the participation of civil society and other stakeholders. The roadmap should specify time lines and realistic qualitative and quantitative targets based on specific indicators and on detailed dialogue between the interested parties. The roadmap should set out how active inclusion is to be implemented and monitored through the Open Method of Coordination for social protection and social inclusion.