Face of female poverty in the European Union

2010/2162(INI) - 08/03/2011 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the face of female poverty in the European Union.

Parliament states that 17% of all women in the EU's 27 countries are classed as living in poverty and that women are increasingly bearing the burden of poverty and being at risk of poverty, in particular categories of women with special needs, such as disabled women, elderly women and parents bringing up a child without a partner (especially single mothers and widows with dependent children) and groups most vulnerable to exclusion, such as Roma women, and immigrant women. The resolution indicates that female poverty is not only the result of the recent economic crisis but the consequence of various factors including stereotypes, existing gender pay gaps, barriers caused by the lack of reconciliation between family and work life, the longer life expectancy of women and, in general, the various types of gender discrimination.

Feminisation of poverty: Parliament proposes a series of measures, such as:

- the mainstream of the concept of gender equality in all employment policies and special measures so as to improve access to employment, avoid over-representation of women in precarious employment;
- integration measures and social protection measures, in the light of the 'Europe 2020' flagship initiative on combating poverty and social exclusion, and in response to the European Parliament's resolutions on the same issue;
- the adoption of a gender-specific perspective as a key component of all common policies;
- the strengthening of the European strategy on social inclusion and protection and to step up efforts to improve the situation of single parents;
- the strengthening of their commitment and take specific measures to eradicate poverty and combat social exclusion putting specific emphasis on the most vulnerable groups (single-parent households, families with three or more children, disabled people, ethnic minorities, especially the Roma, people living in the most disadvantaged microregions, people with decreased work capacity and young people without work experience);
- elderly women with diseases typical of their age to have access to preventive and diagnostic medicine;
- gender policies and EU principles to be applied at all levels, locally and nationally.

Combating women's poverty through labour policies and social protection: Parliament calls on the Member States for specific programmes to promote the active inclusion or **reintegration of women on the labour market** and for specific opportunities for life-long training. In the interests of not adding to the insecurity experienced by women on the employment market, Members call for family responsibilities to be taken into account when selecting employees for dismissal, bearing in mind that in many situations women have custody of children.

Parliament considers **active employment policy** very important in preventing poverty and a process in which social partners play an essential role. It stresses the need to establish a **transparent regulatory framework for atypical forms of employment** in order to ensure proper working conditions and decent pay, given that finding employment is a motor for combating poverty.

Moreover, Members call for the following actions to be made:

- provide appropriate social benefits for women and men who take care of elderly, sick or disabled relatives, and for elderly women, who receive particularly small pensions;
- revise the existing legislation relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women;
- eliminate gender inequalities in employment as part of the EU 2020 Strategy and strongly encourage establishing as an objective the reduction of the gender pay gap by 1% each year, in order to achieve a target of 10% reduction by 2020;
- set up counselling centres to identify and combat the exploitation of women workers, which is one of the main causes of poverty and social exclusion;
- consider **reviewing taxation and social protection systems** with a view to individualising rights in pensions and social security schemes in order to eliminate the 'breadwinner advantage', guaranteeing equal pension rights and removing incentives that adversely affect women's labour-market and social participation;
- develop and implement as a matter of urgency a strategy to **halve child poverty by 2012** and break the spiral of poverty in general;
- facilitate single parents' entry into and return to the labour market, as well as welfare arrangements for single-parent families;
- review their immigration policies in order to dismantle structural obstacles to full labour market participation by migrants.

Furthermore, the resolution calls on the Commission and Member States to identify, adopt and monitor specific gender indicators in the field of poverty eradication and the promotion of social inclusion. It stresses the need to develop appropriate employment integration and training policies at national level, together with special tax arrangements for one-parent families, as part of the fight against poverty, child poverty and social exclusion.

The resolution calls on the Commission to closely examine obstacles to social participation such as energy poverty, financial exclusion and obstacles to accessing information and communication technology (ICT). It also stresses the importance of coordinating policies to fight unemployment and social exclusion at all levels of government in order to combat poverty effectively.

Reconciliation of family life and work by women who live in poverty or are exposed to the risk of poverty: Parliament calls on the Commission and the Member States to take the necessary measures to promote the reconciliation of work and private life, in order to enable women who are exposed to the risk of poverty to pursue their careers in full time work, or to provide access to part time work and other flexible work arrangements, including by means of reversible part-time work arrangements during periods spent as carers. Stressing that one-third of single-parent families in Europe are living in poverty, Parliament calls on the Member States to take active measures to prevent discrimination against pregnant women on the labour market, as well as measures to ensure that motherhood does not affect the right of women workers to pensions and that the scale of those pensions is not affected by the fact they have taken maternity leave. It reminds the Member States that the provision of adequate childcare is a fundamental part of gender equality on the labour market and regrets that the 2002 Barcelona European Council targets on pre-school childcare provision for at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years, which set objectives up to 2010, are far from being met. Plenary calls on the Member States to take targeted action to **ensure that women in a disadvantaged environment have fair access to public health systems** - in particular to primary health care and also to gynaecological and obstetric health care, decent housing, justice, education, training, life-long learning, sport and culture, to prevent the premature abandonment of schooling. Parliament calls on the Member States to develop appropriate measures to **support teenage mothers**.

Combating poverty among older women: the resolution stresses that the risk of falling into poverty is greater for women than for men, particularly in old age. Given that social security systems are based on the principle of continuous remunerated employment, Members point out that, in some cases, women do

not fulfil this requirement because of interruptions to their work and that they are penalised because of discrimination on the labour market, in particular because of the wage gap, maternity leave and part-time work, or as a result of taking a break from or stopping work to take on family responsibilities. Members call on the Member State governments to give recognition to the bringing up of children and ensure that this period counts towards a pension, thereby enabling women to benefit from **full pensions.** Parliament recommends that Member States ensure the provision of adequate pensions for women and to take action to ensure fair access for women to social security and pension systems, taking into account the higher life expectancy of women, and to provide adequate social security for the women responsible for the care of sick, elderly or disabled members of their families, and for elderly women who receive a particularly low pension.

Impact of gender based violence on the risk of poverty: given the gravity of violence against women in the EU, the resolution once again calls on the Commission to establish a European Year for combating violence against women. Parliament calls on the Member States to: (i) record, analyse and study the factors which lead to domestic violence so that policies can be developed immediately to prevent and deal with the consequences of such violence; (ii) take the necessary measures to e**liminate customary or traditional harmful attitudes and practices**, including female genital mutilation, early and forced marriages, and honour crimes; (iii) establish national plans to combat all forms of violence against women and ensure the highest standards of legislation with regard to combating male violence against women; (iv) provide adequate funding for the support and protection of victims of violence; (v) take gender-specific measures to address issues which are not only linked to income poverty, but which relate to culture, social and political participation and social networks.

Social dialogue and civil society in fighting women's poverty: Parliament stresses the importance of a structured social dialogue in fighting women's poverty. It points, in this regard, to the need to improve systems for taking part in, and collaborating with, women's organisations, other NGOs and relevant stakeholders and civil society in general. It calls on the Commission to maintain the financial allocation that may be used among civil society organisations in fighting and curbing the effects of women's poverty.

Ensuring funding as a means to combat poverty: lastly, Parliament emphasises the importance of the structural funds, in particular the European Social Fund, as a key tool for assisting Member States to combat poverty and social exclusion. It calls on the Member States for more co-funded actions to give greater support to services such as care facilities for children and for elderly and dependent persons, including by testing new forms of public-private organisational and financial cooperation and new arrangements for such cooperation. Parliament also stresses the need for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) Regulation to be amended to enable, as with the European Social Fund (ESF), proactive measures to be taken in support of women in the 2014-2020 programming period.