

# European Platform against poverty and social exclusion

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Frédéric DAERDEN (S&D, BE) on the European Platform against poverty and social exclusion.

Members recall 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. In this respect, Members stress that the increasing poverty in the EU is currently being exacerbated by the economic and financial crisis and by soaring food prices in the context of almost inexistent food surpluses in the EU, and that 43 million people are currently at risk of food poverty.

Faced with such a situation, Members call 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, as well as people living on poverty, etc) in the development of a European strategy at all levels of governance (European, national, regional and local).

Members also call 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 that combating poverty is primarily the responsibility of national policies.

**Evaluation mechanism:** the report calls:

- for 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;
- for the improvement of national and European indicators as regards the comparability of national statistics on poverty among vulnerable groups, and 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**;
- 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;
- on the Commission to draw up and present an annual report to Parliament on the Member States' progress in reducing poverty and social exclusion.

**Horizontal social clause:** Members call 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. They call 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:** Members call 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. They call 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, Members ask the Commission to provide further explanation on the contribution of the European Social Fund (ESF) to this flagship initiative and on specific measures addressing priorities such as the fight against poverty among children, women, elderly people and migrant workers, and the prevention of early school leaving.

As regards **food distribution scheme** for the most deprived people in the EU, Members contest 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). They call 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 so as to ensure that people dependent on food aid do not suffer food poverty.

**Basket of basic goods and services:** Members call 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. They call 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.

**2008 recommendation:** Members welcome the Commission's announcement of a communication on the implementation of its 2008 recommendation concerning the active inclusion strategy. They call for that communication to include, in particular, a timetable for implementing the strategy's three component strands, namely:

1. 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;
2. 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;
3. access to quality services: the Member States should ensure that those concerned receive appropriate social support to facilitate their economic and social inclusion.

**Homelessness:** Members believe 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.

The report 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:** Members recommend 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. They call 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, Members recommend, 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. They consider EU action in deprived neighbourhoods as a cost-efficient way to combat exclusion and reduce health expenditure, and call 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:** Members recall 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.

Members urge the Member States to step up their efforts to combat substantially and effectively the problem of undeclared employment. The Commission is called upon to tackle the problem of the **working poor**. The report urges the Member States to make public employment offices more effective, inter alia by identifying the needs of the labour market more accurately. It also recalls that women are at greater risk of falling into extreme poverty than men and calls for a whole range of specific policies which should be tailored to both the gender dimension and the specific circumstances.

**Education/training:** Members take 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. They support 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:** Members wish 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. They want the Commission to help Member States share best practice in relation to minimum income levels, and encourage Member States to develop minimum income schemes based on at least 60% of the median income in each Member State.

Members also ask 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;
- **people with disabilities:** Members recommend 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;

- **Roma:** Members call 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. They stress 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:** the committee 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. Members point 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:** the committee 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:** Members acknowledge 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. They maintain 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 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:** the report 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'**.

Members call 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;
- close gaps in the existing anti-discrimination legislation, which does not currently cover all relevant aspects, with a view to further eradicating discrimination, including social discrimination.

Members take the view that 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, Members welcome 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. They are 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. They stress, however, 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**.

The report calls for a framework directive 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.