Reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Inês Cristina ZUBER (GUE/NGL, PT) on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty.

Members recalled that between 2008 and 2012 the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe (EU27+Norway, Iceland and Switzerland) rose by almost one million, increasing by half a million between 2011 and 2012 alone.

According to Eurostat data, in 2013, 26.5 million children in the EU-28 were at risk of falling into poverty or social exclusion and in the EU-27 the risk of poverty or social exclusion increased between 2008 and 2012 from 26.5% to 28%.

Against this background, Members recommended that Member States make a **real commitment to developing policies to fight child poverty** that focus on correcting child poverty factors and increase the effectiveness, quantity, amounts and scope of the social support specifically directed at children, and promote labour laws that guarantee social rights, including a statutory adequate minimum wage.

A three-pillared approach: Members recommended that the Commission establish with Member States a roadmap for the implementation of the three-pillar approach taken in the Commission recommendation ‘Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage’ in terms of:

1. access to resources,
2. access to services,
3. children’s participation.

They considered that, in order to achieve better results with the three-pillar approach, it could be useful to develop precise and specific indicators of the level of child poverty and the areas more affected by this phenomenon.

Childhood: a priority: Members stressed that the reduction of child poverty by investing in children should be proposed as a core priority for the 2016 Annual Growth Survey, and as a key means of progressing on the poverty target.

They called on the Member States, when using European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) resources and developing social policies, to devote greater attention to protecting families (especially single-parent families) with children with health problems against poverty.

Member States are also called upon to **implement or enhance universal welfare benefits targeting children**, such as:

- the provision of subsidised or **free meals for children**, especially for disadvantaged and poor children;
- adopting active employment measures as part of comprehensive strategies and policies to support parents access to good-quality employment and adequate income,
- access to high-quality public services (particularly childcare, education, health, housing, and leisure activities);
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- strengthening the participation of children and their families in the development, implementation and monitoring of these policies.

No budget cuts: Members called on the Commission to refrain from recommending reformulations and cuts in the public services of Member States, from promoting flexible labour relations and the privatisation of public services, which have led unequivocally to the weakening of the social rights of children. They asked the Commission to emphasise the need for investment in free, public education by pinpointing specific education methods for the most vulnerable social groups, such as immigrants or people with disabilities of various kinds.

Reduce child poverty: Member States are urged to adopt, implement and monitor plans for alleviating multidimensional child poverty, putting the focus on the intrinsic rights of children and setting targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion. They are also urged to implement plans to alleviate the sense of social exclusion felt by children with learning difficulties.

Members called for the Commission and Parliament to take the opportunity provided by the midterm review of the multiannual financial framework to make better use of the European Social Fund, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived and the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation. They recommended that Member States' **national budgets** contain visible, transparent, participatory and accountable provisions for appropriations and costs to combat child poverty. They recommended that the Commission and the Member States **set targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion**.

Out-of-school care: Members urged Member States to devote greater attention to the creation and availability of a suitable out-of-school environment in which children can spend their time in a meaningful and stimulating way outside school hours and during school holidays. They called on the Member States to avoid ghettoisation of children experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

They recommended that the Member States should guarantee all children **access to free, inclusive and quality public education at all ages**, including early childhood education and care, and formal and non-formal education. They urged Member States to provide universal and equal access to crèches and preschools for children from all social groups.

Child protection: Members called on the Member States to implement specific legislation to protect and increase maternity and paternity rights, including through the implementation of efficient instruments to ensure a balance between work and family. The recommended that the Member States move away from institutional care in **favour of stable foster care systems** which better prepare children and young people for an independent life, continued learning or work.

Moreover, they called for the development and implementation of integrated child protection systems to protect children against violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

Access to healthcare for children: Members urged the Member States to guarantee universal, public, free and quality health care with regard to prevention, immunisation programmes and primary care.

Members called on the Member States and the Commission to participate actively in combating the trafficking of children for any form of exploitation, including work, forced marriage, illegal adoption, illegal activities and sexual exploitation.

Lastly, Members recommended that the Commission and the Member States develop statistical methods that integrate multidimensional indicators, disaggregated by age, gender and particular disadvantaged groups, in measuring poverty, social exclusion, inequalities, discrimination and child well-being.