Meeting the antipoverty target in the light of increasing household costs

2015/2223(INI) - 25/02/2016 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Tamás MESZERICS (Greens/EFA, HU) on meeting the anti-poverty target in the light of increasing household costs.

Between 2008 and 2013, the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU increased from 117 million to 122.6 million. **In 2013, 16.7 % of the population of the EU was at risk of poverty** after social transfers, 9.6 % were in a situation of serious material deprivation and 10.7 % of households were considered to have very low work intensity. This development runs counter to the strategic objective of the EU that is defined in its Europe 2020 Strategy and which aims to **reduce the number of people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020**.

Based on the recommendations developed in this initiative report, Members called on the Commission and the Member States to:

- **invest fully in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and to adopt an integrated strategy** to combat its various forms by means of a holistic approach linking economic, education, employment, energy transport and social policies on the basis of best practices;
- sign up to a **winter heating disconnection moratorium** so as to ensure that during a defined winter period no household can be cut off from energy or that those who are must be reconnected emphasising that related costs are public responsibility in nature, since social policies are primarily the responsibility of governments; Member States should evaluate the measures needed to comply with the World Health Organisation (WHO) standards for adequate housing temperature;
- carry out an **impact assessment of minimum income schemes in the EU** and to evaluate the manner and the means of providing at Member State level an adequate minimum income above the poverty threshold of 60% of national median income in all Member States in line with national practices and traditions respecting the characteristics of each of them;
- ensure a more efficient, targeted and more carefully monitored use of the **European Structural and Investment Funds** (ESI Funds) by national, regional and local authorities in order to tackle energy poverty, increasing living costs, social exclusion, housing deprivation, and the insufficient quality of the housing stock; the Commission should allow greater flexibility in this field;
- dedicate a **summit** to the reduction of poverty, extreme poverty and social exclusion and access to decent living standards.

The initiative report aims to **build bridges between social policy and energy policy** in the European debate. In this regard, it called on the Commission and its Member States to:

- **target funding and policies towards tackling poverty and energy poverty**: Member States and the EU are urged to provide microcredits or loans free of interest or at low rates via (e.g. the EIB) to low-income households to support them in the upfront investment in renewables or energy efficiency, such as insulation, solar energy and energy efficient appliances. Any investment made, either in new homes or in improving existing homes, should be based on energy efficiency;
- **evaluate**, in the framework of the energy efficiency package, the application of relevant provisions in Directive 2012/27/EU to target households affected by energy poverty and social housing and on the basis of this evaluation to consider strengthening the provisions of the Directive so that Member States are encouraged to ;include social aims in their energy efficiency obligation schemes
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- **propose decisive measures on social housing** and enhance energy efficiency investment in social rental housing through European funds: Members recommended that the Member States expand the supply of quality social housing in order to guarantee access for all, and in particular for the most disadvantaged, to adequate housing and to further use their opportunities to provide social housing with alternative legal constructions.

The report also urged for measures to **end the outrageous gender pay gap in the EU** which is a key contributors to female poverty. It noted that lone parents, the majority of whom are women, are at a higher than average risk of poverty (34 %). Therefore, measures need to be taken to address female poverty and social exclusion through initiatives to guarantee high-quality jobs with a living wage in female-dominated sectors, as well as measures to legislate for a living wage that guarantees that workers' basic needs can be met.

The European Commission and the Member States are called upon to :

- press ahead with their efforts to tackle socio-economic inequalities, which would ultimately make it possible to reduce some of the inequalities relating to **healthcare** by focusing their attention on the needs of vulnerable groups such as people living in poverty;
- put in place strategies aimed at **reducing the digital divide** and promoting equal access to new information and communications technologies;
- do everything possible to ensure that all people have **access to drinking water** as soon as possible.