Reducing inequalities and promoting social inclusion in times of crisis for children and their families

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The European Parliament adopted by 386 votes to 87, with 141 abstentions, a resolution on reducing inequalities and promoting social inclusion in times of crisis for children and their families.

Child poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon stemming from household poverty, meaning that low-income and lower-education families, single-parent families – mostly made up of women and their children – large disadvantaged families, families living in disadvantaged regions, families from different ethnic minorities and families with children or parents with disabilities are at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion and have a higher probability of intergenerational transmission of poverty.

The resolution stated that in 2022, more than 19 995 million children (24.7 %, or one in four children) were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU.

Investing in reducing inequalities

The Commission and Member States are called on to:

- significantly increase and ensure sustainable and adequate public investment in policies that have a direct and indirect impact on children's lives by guaranteeing universal, inclusive and affordable high-quality public services;

- bolster, at every level, mechanisms for ensuring the meaningful, safe and inclusive participation of children, families, carers and civil society organisations in the development, implementation, monitoring and assessment of these policies;

- promote the creation of quality jobs with open-ended forms of employment and innovative forms of work with strong labour rights, based on decent and fair wages and decent working conditions that guarantee access to social, occupational safety and health protection, and robust collective bargaining as a crucial mechanism for representing and defending workers' rights;

- promote family-centred childhood policies and intervention, paying attention to the needs and aspirations of families, as an element to enhance cohesion in society.

Member States are called on to:

- implement legislation that protects or enhances maternity, paternity and parental rights;

- set up counselling structures to support families and ensure children's access to justice.

On a **financial level**, the resolution called on the EU budgetary authorities to take advantage of the upcoming mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027 to strengthen and make better use of the ESF+, the European Regional Development Fung, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, InvestEU, as well as the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF), in order to strengthen structural policies and social support for children and

families while accounting for the multi-sectoral nature of poverty. Parliament reiterated its repeated calls for the urgent increase in funding of the Child Guarantee, with a dedicated budget of at least EUR 20 billion for the period 2021-2027. It insists on making this dedicated budget part of the revised MFF and reinforced ESF+.

Strong public policies to reduce inequalities

Parliament stressed the need for increased investment in inclusive and high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, without neglecting children aged 0-3 and children from economically and socially disadvantaged families. It stressed that there must be a sufficient number of childcare services that are equally accessible throughout the EU. It regretted the Council's downgrading of the Commission' s proposal for ensuring that at least 50 % of children below the age of three can participate in ECEC to 45 %.

Again, in order to improve the quality of ECEC services, adequate financial and human resources and appropriate pedagogical training of staff with knowledge of child psychology and child chronobiology is needed to ensure the overall development of children.

The resolution highlighted the importance of investments in **public and free education** that ensure an individualised approach for children belonging to more vulnerable social groups. The Commission and the Member States are called on to specifically ensure access to **inclusive, high-quality education** for all persons with disabilities in order to tackle the difficulties that affect them.

Member States are urged to include healthy food in their public health strategies.

Tackling discrimination and social exclusion

Parliament condemns all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and negligence, including online, with regard to children, as well as violence against women, domestic and gender-based violence. It called on the Member States to develop, strengthen and implement integrated prevention and protection systems for children and other victims with a view to eradicating violence, abuse, exploitation and negligence.

In addition, the Commission and the Member States are called on to pay specific attention in the implementation of the Child Guarantee to the unique challenges faced by Roma children, who often experience extreme poverty, exclusion, and discrimination in all spheres of life.

Further investment and support is needed for refugee and migrant children, especially unaccompanied minors and stateless children and their families.

The right of every child to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, participation and play

The resolution highlighted the importance of adapting living, care and education facilities to climate emergencies and of mainstreaming a child-sensitive approach to this problem, including these facilities' involvement in related activities and the acquisition of skills necessary for the climate transition. Member States should ensure that children have the right to a safe, secure and clean environment.

The right to **culture, sport and leisure** and to access to open spaces and a healthy environment for all children is stressed. Member States are called on to promote appropriate extracurricular and leisure activities that enable all children, regardless of their socio-economic background and family situation, to spend their time after school and during holidays doing something physically and mentally stimulating. In this regard, Parliament encouraged Member States to use available European funds to promote the equal participation of children from disadvantaged households in extracurricular and leisure activities.