

Juvenile delinquency - role of women, the family and society

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted, by a large majority, the report by Katerina **BATZELI** (PES, EL) on juvenile delinquency, the role of women, the family and society. In so doing, it stressed that juvenile delinquency can be effectively combated only by adopting an integrated strategy at national and European level which will mesh three guiding principles: **prevention**, the **social inclusion** of all young people, and **legislative management measures**.

1) Policies at national level: the committee considers that the prevention of juvenile delinquency should be organised at three basic levels: (1) primary prevention directed at all citizens; (2) secondary prevention directed at occasional or potential juvenile offenders; (3) tertiary prevention directed at persistent juvenile offenders, in a bid to put an end to such behaviour.

It recalls that **families, schools and society** in general must work together to combat the growing phenomenon of juvenile violence. They draw the attention to the specific role the **family** plays in all stages of this fight against juvenile delinquency and asks them to develop adequate support for parents. In this context, they:

- encourage the Member States to ensure that their national policies include provision for **one-year parental leave** which would enable families which so wish to devote particular attention to the initial upbringing of their child (which is of such great importance to a child's emotional development);
- consider it necessary to establish a series of concrete restrictions and benchmarks that families, educators and society must convey to young people from their infancy;
- call on the Member States to give particular assistance to families with financial and social problems.

At **school level**, the MEPs:

- call on the education authorities to issue necessary guidelines regarding an up-to-date approach to conflict management at school;
- consider it essential to provide special training for teachers in the management of heterogeneous classes;
- call on the Member States in addition to include within their educational policies the provision of special counselling and psychological support for children encountering problems of social integration.

Other specific measures are presented such as:

- reaching an agreement with the media on a 'road map' upholding the rights of the child and in particular those of juvenile offenders, involving a ban on the broadcasting of extremely violent images at certain times of the day and prohibiting the revelation of the identity of those involved in juvenile delinquency;
- improving the quality of youth centres.

On a **legislative** note, the committee calls on the Member States to update judicial and legislative procedures in respect of juvenile delinquency, moving towards decriminalisation, depenalisation and a lessening of the jurisdiction of courts and other institutions. It recommends in this connection reducing to an absolute minimum actions punishable by deprivation of freedom and partial or total custodial sentences for juveniles, replacing them with a wide range of alternative educational measures at the discretion of the national courts, such as community service, reparation and mediation with victims, vocational training, road safety instruction and special counselling regarding drugs dependency and alcohol addiction. Member States are urged to adopt new innovatory legal measures in response to the problem, such as the direct involvement in the criminal proceedings of the parents or guardians of juveniles from prosecution up to the implementation of sentences, accompanied by education and intensive psychological support measures, placing juveniles with foster families where considered necessary, together with support, in the form of advice and information, for parents, teachers and pupils in connection with violent behaviour by juveniles at school.

It is made clear in the report that in the case of juvenile delinquency the conduct and the duration of the judicial proceedings, the choice of the measure to be adopted and the subsequent implementation thereof must be guided by the principle of the overriding interest of the child and observance of procedural law. The committee stresses that imprisonment must be ordered only as a last resort and that any prison sentence must be served in facilities suitable for juvenile delinquents.

Member States are called upon to earmark separate budget appropriations specifically for measures to prevent juvenile delinquency, increase funding for social and workplace integration for young people and for the improvement and modernisation of central and regional facilities for juvenile offenders and for the provision of specialist and ongoing training for all individuals involved in a professional capacity and all organisations concerned.

2) Towards a European strategy: the Member States, in cooperation with the Commission, are asked to draw up and adopt immediately a number of minimum standards and guiding principles common to all Member States in relation to juvenile delinquency to focus on the four basic pillars of prevention, **rehabilitation, social integration or reintegration and judicial or non-judicial measures.** The objective of a common European approach should be to define models for intervention to deal with and manage juvenile delinquency, while recourse to custodial measures and punishment should constitute the last resort and be implemented only when judged to be absolutely necessary.

The Commission is called upon to lay down specific criteria for all Member States for the collection of national statistics in order to ensure that they are comparable and therefore usable during the planning of measures on a European scale.

MEPs call on the Commission and the Member States as an initial measure to develop existing European resources and programmes encompassing measures to cope with and prevent juvenile delinquency and facilitate satisfactory social reintegration of perpetrators and victims, examples being : the special 2007-2013 programme for 'Preventing and Combating Crime'; the specific 'Criminal Justice' programme for 2007-2013; the DAPHNE III programme to combat violence against juveniles and children; European Social Funds.

Other measures have been approved to raise awareness of the violence portrayed on television, for example, the **Television Without Frontiers Directive** (Directive 89/552/EEC) sets strict limits regarding the broadcasting of violent and unsuitable images. The committee calls on the Commission to extend existing obligations to cover mobile telephony and the Internet.

Other innovative measures are proposed such as:

1) the setting up of **European Juvenile Delinquency Observatory**, the purpose of which will be to collect and make a comparative assessment of statistics from all the Member States, disseminate experience and good practices, plan and promote innovative initiatives and programmes at international, inter-regional and Community level, provide advisory support, organise seminars with the participation of the national authorities and, finally, organise technical and scientific cooperation on matters relating to personnel training and the exchange of professionals;

2) the setting up of a free **Europe-wide telephone hotline for children and young people with problems**

Lastly, the committee asked for creation of a new budget heading should be created for integrated actions and networks to combat juvenile delinquency and for a publication of a study on the extent of the problem in Europe.