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on social reality stocktaking
(2007/2104(INI))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Liz Lynne

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on social reality stocktaking (2007/2104(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication entitled "Proposal for the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion" (COM(2007)0013), and the Joint Report as adopted by the EPSCO Council on 22 February 2007,
- having regard to the Commission communication on social reality stocktaking - Interim report to the 2007 Spring European Council (COM(2007)0063),
- having regard to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951,
- having regard to the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families 1990,
- having regard to the UN International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002,
- having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings 2005,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006,
- having regard to Articles 34, 35 and 36 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union¹, which specifically define the right to social and housing assistance, a high level of human health protection and access to services of general economic interest,
- having regard to the Commission communication on Strengthening the social dimension of the Lisbon strategy: Streamlining open coordination in the field of social protection (COM(2003)0261),
- having regard to the Commission communication on modernising social protection for the development of high-quality, accessible and sustainable health care and long-term care: support for the national strategies using the "open method of coordination" (COM(2004)0304),

¹ OJ C 364, 18.12.2000, p.1.

- having regard to the Commission Green Paper entitled "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations" (COM(2005)0094),
- having regard to the Commission communication concerning a consultation on action at EU level to promote the active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market (COM(2006)0044) and the Synthesis Report on the outcomes of that consultation,
- having regard to the point of view expressed in the Sixth Environmental Action Programme of the European Community 2002-2012 that a clean and healthy environment is a precondition for human well-being;
- having regard to Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin¹ and Parliament's resolution of 28 April 2005 on the situation of the Roma in the European Union²,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 June 2002 on the communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Draft Joint Report on social inclusion³,
- having regard to its resolution of 5 June 2003 on the application of the open method of coordination⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 September 2003 on the Joint Report by the Commission and the Council on adequate and sustainable pensions⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 23 March 2006 on demographic challenges and solidarity between the generations⁶,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 September 2006 on improving the mental health of the population. Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union⁷,
- having regard to its resolution of 30 November 2006 on the situation of people with disabilities in the Enlarged European Union: the European Action Plan 2006-2007⁸,
- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the opinions of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0400/2007),

¹ OJ L 180, 19.7.2000, p. 22.

² OJ C 45 E, 23.2.2006, p. 129.

³ OJ C 261 E, 30.10.2003, p. 136.

⁴ OJ C 68 E, 18.3.2004, p. 604.

⁵ OJ C 77 E, 26.3.2004, p. 251.

⁶ OJ C 316 E, 22.12.2006, p. 370.

⁷ OJ C 292 E, 1.12.2006, p. 131.

⁸ OJ C 305 E, 14.12.2006, p. 148.

- A. Whereas, the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 agreed to strengthen social cohesion and combat social exclusion,
- B. Whereas, at the Nice European Council of 7-9 December 2000, the Member States undertook to show a significant and measurable reduction in poverty and social exclusion by the year 2010; whereas progress towards that objective has been insufficient,
- C. Whereas social inclusion and social protection are basic values of the European Union and fundamental rights for all individuals, regardless of ethnic origin, age, gender, disability, sexual preference or religion,
- D. Whereas over 50 million people or around 16 % of the European Union's total working population are disabled and the rate of unemployment among them is twice as high as among the able bodied,
- E. Whereas 78 million European citizens continue to live in poverty and 8 % of the European Union suffers from in-work poverty and the gap between rich and poor in many Member States is increasing,
- F. Whereas Europe today is a multi-ethnic, multi-faith society and Member States must ensure that their laws reflect that diversity, protecting all individuals from violence, discrimination and harassment,
- G. Whereas the effects of inequality, poverty, social exclusion and lack of opportunity are interlinked, requiring a coherent strategy at Member State level focusing not only on income and wealth, but also on issues such as access to employment, education, health services, the information society, culture, transport and opportunities of future generations,
- H. Whereas poverty and unemployment have been linked to poor health and poor access to health care due to factors such as poor diet, inferior living conditions in disadvantaged areas, inadequate housing, and stress,
- I. Whereas in most Member States children are at a greater risk of poverty and social exclusion than adults,
- J. Whereas poverty and inequality disproportionately affects women; whereas the average income of women is just 55 % that of men, and older women have a more difficulties in accessing the labour market,
- K. Whereas poverty disproportionately affects poorly educated persons, whereas the Commission and Member States should propose joint action to improve access and the right to life-long education and training,
- L. Whereas social phenomena such as trafficking in human beings, organised crime, gender discrimination and prostitution are closely linked,

- M. Whereas unemployment levels among disabled people, which include people with mental health problems, older people and ethnic minorities across the European Union, remains unacceptably high,
- N. Whereas carers, the largest unpaid workforce in the European Union, deserve recognition for the central role they play in community care,
- O. Whereas services are increasingly becoming inaccessible to poorer sections of society,
- P. Whereas income inequality is on the increase in most Member States,

General points

1. Calls on the Member States to make optimal use of the potential offered by the Open Method of Coordination;
2. Calls on the Member States to exchange best practices and to follow good examples in the area of social protection and social integration;
3. Believes that poverty and social exclusion can be tackled only by guaranteeing the social and economic rights of all;
4. Stresses that strengthening social cohesion, the eradication of poverty, and social exclusion must become a political priority for the European Union; welcomes in this regard the forthcoming proposal from the Commission to make 2010 the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion; calls on the Commission and Member States to specify and pursue an ambitious objective of reducing poverty, especially among working people, in Europe;
5. Welcomes the conclusions of the Brussels European Councils on 23 and 24 March 2006 and 8 and 9 March 2007, to the effect that Member States should take measures rapidly and significantly to reduce child poverty, providing all children with equal opportunities, regardless of their social background;
6. Urges the Commission to facilitate the exchange of best practices among Member States in the area of combating discrimination on the labour market, including in the area of traineeships;
7. Emphasises that employment guaranteeing fair and decent wages and working conditions must be viewed, together with education and effective and efficient social security systems, as one of the most potent safeguards against poverty and social inclusion, - bearing in mind that it is not, however, sufficient to ensure the inclusion of certain social groups that are typically the most disadvantaged; therefore calls on the Commission and Member States to implement effectively Directive 78/2000/EC¹, which establishes a legal framework for equal treatment in employment; welcomes the Commission's ongoing examination of the transposition of that Directive and encourages the Commission to take necessary action in cases where transposition has not been properly effected; calls on the

¹ OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16.

Commission to address in its report resulting from the consultation launched in its communication on social reality stocktaking the issues relating to 'quality of work';

8. Stresses the need for support to be provided for manufacturing, micro-businesses, SMEs, small agricultural businesses, family farms and the social economy, in view of the important role that they play in creating jobs and well-being;
9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take measures to guarantee the full enjoyment of human, social and political rights by all women working in another Member State;
10. Stresses that access to goods and services should be a right for every EU citizen and therefore calls on the Commission to propose specific directives relating to all areas not already covered by instruments adopted on the basis of Article 13 of the Treaty in order to combat discrimination in access to goods and services including disability, age, religion or belief or sexual orientation;
11. Stresses that corporate social responsibility is not limited to generating and sustaining employment opportunities but also encompasses - for example - quality of employment, equal remuneration and promotion of life-long learning;
12. Stresses that discrimination on all grounds should be given equal attention;
13. Emphasises the major role played by public services in promoting social cohesion, which is recognised by the Treaty, and the resulting need to provide public services with a high level of security and accessibility, equal treatment and promotion of universal access and users' rights;
14. Encourages the Commission to make full use of the European dimension to promote, inter alia, the exchange of best practices among Member States, subsidies, information campaigns on diet and physical activity tailored to the needs of specific target groups, in particular children, those being the objectives that the Commission set itself in its White Paper on A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and obesity related health issues (COM(2007)0279), and those being the issues that disproportionately affect the least privileged population groups;
15. Calls on Member States more effectively to implement existing Community legislation in the employment and social policy field, giving special attention to gender equality requirements; urges the Council and the Commission to examine in the Joint Employment Report 2007-2008 how Europe can provide a social level playing field to eradicate unfair competition in the European internal market;
16. Regrets that in its communication on social reality stocktaking, the Commission gives the impression that many social policy initiatives are outdated and stresses instead that social security and social policy are forces favouring productivity and innovation and essential as a basis on which to build a successful and broad knowledge economy;
17. Welcomes the contribution made to protecting public health in Europe by, inter alia, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European

early-warning and rapid-response system for threats to public health (EWRS) in applying the international health regulations;

18. Stresses the importance that the Member States and European institutions must place on compliance with the legislation in force and calls on the Commission to ensure that Community legislation is properly applied, not only on water, air and soil quality and on noise pollution reduction, the application of REACH and reinforced surveillance of chemical products, food manufacture but also on misleading advertising and on advertisements on food products for children and adults.
19. Stresses that people as well as organisations need to be equipped through education, life-long learning and life-long training, including vocational training, to adapt to labour market changes and the challenges of globalisation;
20. Stresses that the disappearance of traditional industrial jobs must be tackled by a series of additional measures including support for the development of new industries, support for SMEs and the development of the social economy;
21. Calls on the Council and the Commission to focus on a ‘win-win’ approach in which existing workers’ rights are complemented and extended by new rights such as the right of access to training and life-long learning and the right to work-family compatible working arrangements;
22. Urges the Member States to enforce legislation which reconciles work and family life, helping parents to remain in the labour market or easily to re-enter it;
23. Urges the Commission and the Member States to give maximum priority to women's social integration and women's rights, by altering their respective policies accordingly, including that on income distribution policy accordingly;

Social inclusion

24. Considers that efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion must be sustained and extended to improve the situation of those people most at risk of poverty and exclusion;
25. Calls on the Commission to incorporate equality and disability issues more closely in all relevant policy areas,
26. Considers that the meaningful participation of those experiencing poverty in the development of policies and practical measures addressing the situation is essential in order to ensure more effective outcomes;
27. Takes the view that special attention should be paid to single parents and single older women, who are a particularly vulnerable group and are often the first to fall into poverty when there is an economic downturn;
28. Recognises that in many Member States individuals are provided with a safety net guaranteeing a decent minimum income and believes that by exchanging best practices Member States that do not have such a safety net should be encouraged to establish one;

29. Recognises that where there is provision of social assistance Member States have a duty to ensure that citizens understand and are able to access their entitlements;
30. Stresses that no-one receiving such support should be left with an income deemed to be below the poverty level for that Member State;
31. Calls on all Member States to ensure full gender equality in all state pension schemes;
32. Firmly believes that a decent living minimum wage should be established at Member State level in cooperation with the social partners where applicable, in order to make work financially viable; but recognises that in many Member States the minimum wage is set very low or at below subsistence level; at the same time, rejects the argument that setting a minimum wage discourages employers from creating jobs; considers it vital that workers are paid a living wage; 33. Considers that Member States should aim to adapt their social security systems to help provide a transition between periods of paid work or training and unemployment, in order to avoid the so-called 'poverty trap' but also to reflect the changing nature of employment;
34. Considers it vital that for Member States to help people back into work by ensuring that they receive personalised, targeted assistance and support to help them build confidence and learn new skills;
35. Believes that it is vital for Member States to help those who become disabled whilst in employment to retain their jobs;
36. Calls on Member States to tackle multiple discrimination, which has a serious and often overlooked impact on social inclusion;
37. Points to the importance of collaboration among the various layers of government – local, regional, national and European – in fighting discrimination;
38. Believes that high quality, community-based health and social care, developed where possible in cooperation with users and patients, can play an important role in the fight against poverty and social exclusion;
39. Notes that there is a strong and complex link between poverty and crime; that extreme poverty and social exclusion may lead to criminal activities and that imprisonment without adequate rehabilitation and education often only lead to further social exclusion and unemployment;
40. Stresses the need to provide education, training and employment within correctional institutions, offering prisoners activities which raise their morale, assist them psychologically and provide them with useful skills for their future return to the employment market;
41. Considers that the Member States and the European Union should place greater emphasis on problems related to addiction to gambling; points out that families in which one or more members are compulsive gamblers are highly likely to experience reduced living standards, social exclusion and poverty, which frequently affect children the most; calls

upon the Member States, therefore, to help disseminate information concerning the dangers, the indications and the impact of compulsive gambling; also calls upon the Commission to ensure that its report on social reality stocktaking includes the problem of compulsive gambling and the effects that it has on social exclusion and poverty;

42. Calls on the Member States to pay attention to growing indebtedness that leads to a higher risk of poverty;
43. Believes that a lack of decent and affordable accommodation in all Member States is an important contributing factor to driving people into poverty and trapping them there; calls on the Commission to respect the prerogative of Member States to define and finance social housing, given the vital role played by the latter in social inclusion policies;
44. Calls on all Member States to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its optional protocol;
45. Calls on the Commission and the Member States, in cooperation with those representing disabled persons' organisations, to develop national, regional and local initiatives to promote feasible employment opportunities for disabled persons; in this connection calls on the Commission and the Member States to improve methods of collecting reliable and comparable statistics concerning the situation of disabled persons on the employment market;
46. Calls on all Member States to comply with their obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
47. Calls on the Member States to encourage the use of new communication and information technologies, which are of key importance to ensuring equal opportunities for the disabled, facilitating their access to education and employment, while reducing their dependence on third parties and promoting self-reliance;
48. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to encourage the planning and development of innovatory forms of aid and equipment, facilitating access for the disabled and the elderly to goods and services;
49. Welcomes the deinstitutionalisation of disabled people but notes that this requires a sufficient level of community-based services favouring independent living, the right to personal assistance, the right to economic independence and full participation in society within Member States;
50. Considers that it remains inexcusable for new infrastructure to be built using the resources of the European Regional Development Fund or other Structural Funds which is inaccessible to people with disabilities and older people;
51. Calls on the Member States, particularly in light of the ageing population, to address issues faced by carers, including the right to choose freely whether they want to be a carer and the extent of the care that they provide, the possibility of combining caring with paid work and employment as well as access to social security schemes and old age pensions, in order to avoid impoverishment as a consequence of caring;

52. Calls on the Member States to examine means of providing recognition for atypical qualifications acquired in providing care for children and dependent adults as a form of previous training and work experience, thereby facilitating employment market access for those concerned;
53. Calls on Member States to encourage public sector employers to aim to create workplaces that are more representative of the communities they serve, while at the same time considering all job candidates irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation;
54. Stresses the importance of active involvement of employers in combating discrimination and the positive effects of diversity policies for the workplace;
55. Takes the view that discrimination against transgendered persons in the employment market and in the area of social security remains an insufficiently exposed problem, and calls on the Member States also to address this form of discrimination; calls on the Commission to launch a study on this issue;
56. Highlights the need for Member States to promote the development and implementation of comprehensive local, regional and national ageing strategies;
57. Calls on the Commission and Member States to provide adequate resources to facilitate access to life-long learning programmes as a means of limiting the exclusion of elderly people among others from employment and to foster their continuous participation in social, cultural and civic life;
58. Urges Member States, if they have not done so, to move towards the provision of high quality and affordable personal care for elderly people and people with disabilities ;
59. Calls on the Member States to exchange best practices relating to encouraging pupils not to drop out of school without gaining the necessary skills to join either the labour market or vocational and higher education institutions and to ease the transition from school to work;
60. Stresses that educational institutions should show greater flexibility regarding the early abandonment of education by young people and should provide assistance for those, who, in addition to their studies, have family responsibilities;
61. Urges Member States to ensure that its citizens are literate and have the skills and knowledge to gain useful employment and to participate fully in society;
62. Regrets that despite welcome moves towards greater participation in higher education, people from less wealthy backgrounds are seriously underrepresented; notes that Member States should be encouraged to maintain; strengthen, introduce and invest in vocational training, work-based apprenticeships and other applied training;
63. Urges the Commission and the Member States to reject the misleading blurring of economic migration with asylum-seeking, and of economic migration and asylum-seeking with illegal immigration;

Social Protection

64. Believes that more action should be taken to tackle domestic violence and the abuse of children and elderly people;
65. Notes with great concern that gender-based violence increases women's social and political exclusion, thereby preventing them from enjoying their human rights; calls on the Member States to reinforce legislation and share good practices in this field;
66. Urges Member States to consider the adequacy and sustainability of their pension systems;
67. Calls on Member States to provide clearer guidelines and advice on pensions to ensure that people receive the information they need to plan their retirement and that national reforms are conducted on the basis of the broadest possible consensus;
68. Notes that inequalities in health outcomes, both between and within Member States, remain wide and urges Member States to tackle them, notably by ensuring effective access to healthcare for all;
69. Calls on Member States to provide more effective child protection systems which include early intervention services to respond to the needs of vulnerable children and the provision of therapeutic services to help maltreated children overcome the effects of abuse;
70. Calls on Member States to develop a more constructive approach to drugs policy with the emphasis on prevention, education and treatment for addiction rather than criminal sanctions;
71. Calls for a better exchange of best practices across the European Union in the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of chronic illnesses;
72. Notes that there is a lack of comparable methods and data regarding long-term care and therefore considers it important to reinforce the targeted exchange of experience among the Member States in this area, in order to increase awareness how high-quality care can best be organised, guaranteed and delivered at a reasonable cost and what methods are best suited to ensuring that older people, including the increasing number of those suffering from dementia, can lead a dignified life;
73. Calls on Member States to prioritise public health measures which seek to tackle head-on the inequality that exists in health and access to health-care; further calls on Member States to adopt specific measures targeting the needs of ethnic minorities;
74. Notes that in all Member States, alcohol and drug abuse can lead to crime, unemployment and social exclusion; further notes that poverty and social exclusion can lead to alcohol and drug abuse; considers it to be unacceptable that the only access to treatment and advice for many people is through the prison system and calls on the Member States to exchange best practices in order to enhance programmes to combat and treat the phenomena;

75. Stresses that people may have many forms of disability, including relating to mobility, vision, hearing, mental health, chronic illness and learning disabilities; highlights the fact that people with multiple disabilities have exceptional problems, as do people subjected to multiple discrimination;
76. Calls for the de-stigmatisation of people with mental health problems and learning disabilities, the promotion of mental health and well-being, the prevention of mental disorders as well as for increased resources for treatment and care;
77. Welcomes the Commission's plan to publish various studies on the needs of disabled people and children with special learning requirements, which will be of relevance to many aspects of life, including education and training;
78. Calls on Member States actively to pursue policies to reduce ill health caused by alcohol, tobacco and other legal as well as illegal drugs;
79. Is aware that policies on alcohol and smoking, and on the abuse of drugs and prescription medicines, are primarily matters for the Member States, but encourages the Commission to play a proactive role in collecting and passing on the experiences of the individual Member States, as it proposes in its Communication on an EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm (COM(2006)0625) and to initiate a consultation process and an open public debate on the best way of continuing the fight against passive smoking, as proposed in its Green Paper 'Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke: policy options at EU level' (COM(2007)0027);
80. Reiterates the points made in its resolution of 15 December 2005 on the Commission's legislative and work programme for 2006¹, particularly as regards threats to public health such as cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS, and on the high pollution levels in towns and conurbations;
81. Stresses the importance of exercise for people's overall well-being and for preventing various diseases which are threats to public health; urges Member States to invest in improvements in facilities to enable people to take exercise and to promote the creation of residential environments which make it easier for people to lead an active and independent life;
82. Recognises that alcohol misuse and drugs consumption can lead to social exclusion, trap children and families in poverty and expose children to a higher risk of abuse;
83. Welcomes the fact that child poverty and social exclusion have become a more important political priority across Member States in recent years; however, calls on the the Commission and the Member States to agree quantifiable targets towards the goal of eradicating the complex phenomenon of child poverty and allocating adequate resources in order to meet that target in order to prevent poverty and social exclusion from being passed down from one generation to the next, giving special consideration to abandoned children, street children and children in institutions;

¹ OJ C 286 E, 23.11.2006, p. 487.

84. Believes that high quality education, health and social services, supporting children and their families, including affordable childcare and access to affordable housing are crucial for the prevention and reduction of child poverty, social exclusion and discrimination and to prevent poverty being carried on from one generation to the next;
85. Calls on the Member States to pay special attention to social protection of lone parent families, which are at higher risk of poverty;
86. Calls on the Member States to ensure that children have access to the services and opportunities that will ensure their present and future well-being and enable them to reach their full potential; also calls on Member States, therefore, to include basic financial education in school curricula;
87. Calls on the Member States to ensure the collection of data on child poverty and to analyse the situation of children at risk of poverty, in particular as regards those at high risk such as children with disabilities, Roma children, children in institutions, migrant children and street children, and to monitor and evaluate their policies in that field and ensure the systematic assessment of the impact of those policies;
88. Calls on the Commission to develop further indicators which can be combined with existing income poverty indicators to give a deeper understanding of child poverty;
89. Stresses the fundamental role played by health care services and general social services in the European social model; calls on the Commission to recognise that role when applying internal market and competition law; emphasises the inadequate funding of those services, especially in certain eastern European Member States;
90. Considers that the liberalisation of health services could lead to greater inequality of access to high-quality health care;
91. Calls on Member States to increase the profile of credit unions to help offer individuals a safe and regulated environment for people to save and borrow money and to counter increasingly problematic personal debt; calls on the Member States to ensure that individuals have the right to open an affordable bank account, which is an essential means by which to participate in both economic activities and society;
92. Recognises that human trafficking results in immense suffering and calls on Member States to enforce anti-trafficking and anti-discrimination legislation, reintegrate the victims of trafficking into society, enhance cross-border cooperation, and, in particular, to sign, ratify and implement the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings; urges Member States to prioritise the protection of victims of trafficking in particular child victims and the implementation of their fundamental human rights;
93. Welcomes the Commission's proposal for a directive on providing for sanctions against employers of illegally staying third-country nationals (COM(2007)0249) and calls on Member States to bring forward legislation and better implement existing European legislation to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable workers by gangmasters and to sign and ratify, if they have not yet done so, the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families;

94. Urges all Member States to safeguard human rights based asylum policy in accordance with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and other relevant human rights law, whilst working to end asylum seekers' dependence on benefits by allowing them to work and consider the development of more legal immigration routes; criticises strongly the ongoing breaches of the Refugee Convention and other human rights law by Member States;
95. Calls for more attention to be paid to homeless people by Member States, especially in access to housing, health, education and employment;
96. Calls on Member States to eliminate the deficiencies in the provisions made for social groups which cannot be integrated into the job market and in the services targeting them, and to ensure that those provisions and services are equitable, universally accessible and sustainable;

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97. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Social Protection Committee, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the candidate countries.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Key message from the report

The report supports the general approach of the Social Reality Stocktaking Communication from the Commission (COM(2007)0063) and its follow-up, that is, to have a general discussion on the role of social policy in the European Union. Given that the Communication states that conclusions from the discussion will also feed into the mid term review of the social policy agenda, the report notes that Parliament should be informed about the outcomes of the discussions and what the Commission intends to do with these regarding the mid term review.

The report notes that social inclusion and social protection are a basic value of the European Union and a fundamental right for all individuals, regardless of ethnic origin, age, gender, disability, sexual preference and religion.

The report notes that 78 million European citizens continue to live in poverty and 8% of the EU suffer from in work poverty and the gap between rich and poor in many EU Member States is increasing.

The report notes that Europe today is a multi-ethnic, multi-faith society and that Member States must ensure that their laws reflect that diversity, protecting all individuals from violence, discrimination and harassment.

The report notes that poverty and unemployment have been linked to poor health due to factors such as poor diet, worse environments in poorer areas, inadequate housing, and stress and that deprived communities in many Member States often have poor access to healthcare.

The report notes that unemployment levels of disabled people (which includes people with mental health problems), older people and ethnic minorities across the European Union, remain unacceptably high.

The report emphasises that employment must be viewed as one of the most effective safeguards against poverty and social exclusion and therefore calls on the Commission and Member States to effectively implement the Employment Directive 78/2000/EC which provides a legal framework for equal treatment in employment.

The report stresses that access to Goods and Services should be a right for every EU citizen and therefore calls on the European Commission to bring forward specific directives for all areas not covered under Article 13 EC Treaty legislation to combat discrimination in access to goods and services including disability, age, religion or belief or sexual orientation.

The report calls on Member States to more effectively implement existing EU legislation in the Employment and Social Policy field.

The report recognises that in many Member States individuals are provided with a safety net

guaranteeing a minimum income and believes by exchange of best practice that Member States who do not operate this can be encouraged to do so.

The report notes that a decent minimum wage, set at Member State level should be encouraged and can help to make work financially viable; but recognising that in many Member States that it is set at a very low level.

The report takes into account previous reports of the Parliament, which stress the importance of social policy having an equal status and fully interacting within the Community policy triangle (economic, employment, social policies)¹. In this regard the Commission should reinforce and clarify the original Lisbon target of eradicating poverty by the adoption of a clear headline target for the EU to reduce the levels of poverty measured against GDP by 2010 and to develop a set of social inclusion standards against which to judge the results of the social inclusion strategy².

The "Stocktaking Social reality" Report is dealing with two Commission documents: the Communication on Social inclusion and Social protection (COM(2007)013) and the Communication on Social Reality Stocktaking (COM(2007)063).

Summary of the Communication on Social inclusion and Social protection

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) has increased awareness of the complex causes of exclusion and poverty and forged a shared approach to social protection reforms based on principles of accessibility, adequacy, quality, modernisation and sustainability. Healthcare and long-term care are also well suited for policy exchange; joint consideration of the objectives can improve policy effectiveness and the delivery of healthcare services at a Member State level.

Some National reform Programmes show a stronger commitment to the most disadvantaged in society and helping poor households benefit from employment growth. Measures to ensure the sustainability of public finances are accompanied by provisions to protect the most vulnerable groups. Strengthened and more visible interaction is required at European and national level.

More importance must be given in Member States to the fight against child poverty, as deprived children are more unlikely to gain jobs in the future. Member States have been shown to approach this issue through: increasing family income, improving access to services, protecting children's rights. The report shows that on average, 15% of students leave school early, but in some countries more than a third of young people are affected by early school leaving. Some Member States have set specific targets and are introducing preventive measures to address this (pre-primary education, guidance and counselling, tutoring, grants) and compensatory actions (e.g. second-chance schools).

¹ Report on the Commission communication on the social policy agenda, Committee EMP, Rapporteur Anne E.M. Van Lancker, A5-0291/2000.

Report on the social situation in the European Union, Committee EMP, Rapporteur Ilda Figueiredo, A6-0035/2005.

² Report on the Social Policy Agenda for the period 2006-2010, Committee EMP, Rapporteur Ria Oomen-Ruijten, A6-0142/2005.

In this respect also the fight against youth unemployment remains important. Many Member States are expanding apprenticeships, providing individualised support or active alternatives after short spells of unemployment, focusing on socially deprived areas or improving access to mainstream measures.

When it comes to geographic inequalities, EU structural funds support improvements in health infrastructure in the poorest regions. To enhance the quality standards: Member States are aiming at better coordination between all level of medical services and at a development of prevention programmes.

Summary of the Communication on Social Reality Stocktaking

Globalisation and demography are the two main driving forces shaping the development of European societies. Demographic trends mean longer and healthier lives and raise issues such as the new costs of an ageing society, intergenerational equity, the increasing importance of childcare and work/life balance in sustaining family life, the relationship between generations and new risks of poverty. Globalisation, in conjunction with new technology, offers enormous potential for growth. But people need to be equipped through education and training to take advantage of these opportunities and adapt to the disappearances of traditional industrial jobs.

The renewed Lisbon strategy does not only focus on economic performance and competitiveness but also on the creation of greater social cohesion and the social dimension of sustainability. Within this strategy, the EU engages with Member States – who continue to hold the primary competence to frame their own policies – to identify collectively the policy approaches which will best deliver the combination of prosperity and solidarity and promote their take-up. The Lisbon strategy has thus opened up a collective reflection on social issues in a very wide sense, covering traditional questions of labour market flexibility and welfare state reform, including pensions, as well as issues relating to education and training systems.

Many social policy initiatives in the past were conceived for an industrial society. Today, Europe has an increasingly knowledge based and services oriented society for which the social situation and social challenges are less well understood and analysed.

The social reality stocktaking exercise therefore aims at developing an evaluation of actual social challenges and at generating a debate on Europe's social situation which will also feed into the mid term review of the social policy agenda.

3.10.2007

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on social reality stocktaking
(2007/2104(INI))

Draftsman: Miroslav Mikolášik

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Regrets keenly that the health inequalities between Member States and between socio-economic groups are growing; stresses that this situation applies to both adults and children, noting that poverty is the main threat to children's health;
2. Stresses in particular the difficult and deteriorating economic and social situation especially of the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups; expresses concern at the recent judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Communities accepting limits on employers' social security obligations; calls on the Commission and the Member States to adopt and apply the measures needed to improve this situation;
3. Takes the view that, given demographic developments and ever-higher life expectancies, it is important to develop public health strategies which aim to prevent diseases, combat them effectively, secure high-quality health care for all and in this way improve Europeans' quality of life; considers it vital, on the basis of this fact, to give particular attention to children's health to ensure that children grow up into adults who will remain in good health; therefore encourages Member States to adopt measures in support of parents and families, such as family-friendly work practices, parent help services in the form of education and care for young children and flexible working schedules, as proposed in the Commission Communication "Promoting Solidarity between the Generations" (COM(2007)0244);

4. Recalls that health is a basic right and that preventive measures and community-based, high-quality health care and treatment must be available to all in case of illness; recalls the objective of the European Union and the Member States to ensure a high level of human health protection in the definition and implementation of Community policies;
5. Calls on the Member States, in view of demographic change, to take firmer action than hitherto to adapt old-age pension provision to the current and projected requirements and to ensure a high standard in the provision of care for all old people irrespective of income and social status, so as to enable everyone to grow old with dignity;
6. Notes that there is a lack of comparable methods and data regarding long-term care and therefore considers it important to reinforce the targeted exchange of experience between the Member States in this area, in order to increase awareness of how high-quality care can best be organised, guaranteed and delivered at a reasonable cost and of what methods are best suited to ensuring that old people, including the increasing number suffering from dementia, can lead a dignified life;
7. Stresses the fundamental role played by health care services and general social services in the European social model; calls on the Commission to recognise this role when applying internal market law and competition law; emphasises the inadequate funding of these services, especially in certain eastern European Member States;
8. Calls on the Member States to guarantee better accessibility of high-quality, affordable and reliable health care for all people, irrespective of their income, social status, age and place of residence, including the most disadvantaged, since this is a precondition for their active involvement in society; and to work further towards dismantling the persistent serious inequalities in health care and access to it;
9. Notes however that the more disadvantaged socio-economic groups are, the less they benefit from improvements in health care determinants; therefore calls on the Commission and the Member States to take this situation into account when drawing up and implementing their various health strategies;
10. Urges Member States to develop the knowledge and skills of the most disadvantaged, in particular, to enable them to gain access to the services which they require and urges Member States in other ways too to devote attention to the opportunities for this group to participate in society;
11. Considers that liberalisation of health services could lead to greater inequality of access to high-quality health care;
12. Notes that poverty and an increased risk of health problems are linked;
13. Notes that social exclusion and health problems arising from people's mental condition are closely linked, that this form of public health can only be improved by preventing social exclusion, and that Member States must therefore pursue sound policies in this field;
14. Calls on the Member States, in view of the rising costs of health care, to take reinforced

measures - such as the use of new technologies, targeted information campaigns, efficient health service management, expansion of reference centres or cross-border cooperation - aimed at delivering high-quality health care for all now and in future and at the same time securing cost savings in the medium term; and urges the Member States and the Commission to issue guidelines after consulting industry and patient groups to provide equal access for all to medicines and medical products and furthermore to take into consideration that health care costs could be reduced not only by government action, but also by greater solidarity between generations and in families and mutual assistance measures at local level;

15. Points out that ill health and other negative impacts associated with environmental pollution (air pollution, dangerous substances, noise etc.) affect first and foremost vulnerable groups in society such as children, the elderly and those suffering from chronic diseases; is alarmed by the reports establishing a link between income and stress from environmental pollution, showing that low-income neighbourhoods are often the most polluted;
16. Encourages the Commission to make full use of the European dimension to promote the exchange of best practice between Member States, subsidies, information campaigns on diet and physical activity, tailored to the needs of specific target groups, in particular children, and other means, these being the objectives it set itself in the White Paper 'A strategy for Europe on nutrition-, overweight- and obesity-related health issues' (COM(2007)0279), issues which disproportionately affect the least privileged population groups;
17. Is aware that policies on alcohol and smoking, and on drug abuse and prescription medication abuse, are primarily matters for the Member States, but encourages the Commission to play a proactive role in collecting and passing on the experiences of the individual Member States, as it proposes in its Communication on an EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm (COM(2006)0625) and to initiate a consultation process and an open public debate on the best way of continuing the fight against passive smoking, as it proposes in its Green Paper 'Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke: policy options at EU level' (COM(2007)0027);
18. Reiterates what it said in its resolution of 15 December 2005 on the Commission's legislative and work programme for 2006,¹ particularly as regards threats to public health such as cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS, and on the high pollution levels in towns and conurbations;
19. Stresses the importance of exercise for people's overall well-being and in preventing various diseases which are threats to public health; urges Member States to invest in improvements in facilities to enable people to take exercise and to promote the creation of residential environments which make it easier for people to lead an active and independent life;
20. Welcomes the contribution made to protecting public health in Europe by, inter alia, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European

¹ OJ C 286 E, 23.11.2006, p. 487.

early-warning and rapid-response system for threats to public health (EWRS) in applying the International Health Regulations;

21. Reiterates the point of view which it expressed in the Sixth Environmental Action Programme that a clean and healthy environment is a precondition for human wellbeing;
22. Acknowledges that the number of suicides is increasing; considers, therefore, that access to mental health care now needs to be guaranteed for all;
23. Stresses the importance that the Member States and European institutions must place on compliance with the legislation in force and calls on the Commission in consequence to ensure that European legislation is properly applied, not only on water, air and soil quality and on noise pollution reduction, the application of REACH and reinforced surveillance of chemical products, food manufacture, etc., but also on the ban on misleading advertising or on advertisements on food products for children and adults.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	2.10.2007
Result of final vote	+ : 39 - : 0 0 : 1
Members present for the final vote	Liam Aylward, Pilar Ayuso, Johannes Blokland, John Bowis, Frieda Brepoels, Dorette Corbey, Chris Davies, Avril Doyle, Jill Evans, Anne Ferreira, Matthias Groote, Gyula Hegyi, Jens Holm, Marie Anne Isler Béguin, Caroline Jackson, Eija-Riitta Korhola, Urszula Krupa, Peter Liese, Linda McAvan, Roberto Musacchio, Riitta Myller, Péter Olajos, Miroslav Ouzký, Vladko Todorov Panayotov, Vittorio Prodi, Guido Sacconi, Karin Scheele, Richard Seeber, Bogusław Sonik, María Sornosa Martínez, Antonios Trakatellis, Thomas Ulmer, Anja Weisgerber, Glenis Willmott
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Rebecca Harms, Karin Jöns, Caroline Lucas, Miroslav Mikolášik, Bart Staes
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Pier Antonio Panzeri

2.10.2007

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on social reality stocktaking
(2007/2104(INI))

Draftswoman: Ilda Figueiredo

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas there is a wide gap between the provisions of law and their effectiveness in changing social realities and gender relations in many Member States,
- B. whereas violence against women is the most common crime to go unpunished throughout the European Union,
- C. whereas social phenomena such as trafficking in human beings, organised crime, gender discrimination and prostitution are closely linked,
 1. Welcomes the wide consultation on the social issues and challenges facing Europe, including the consequences for equal opportunities;
 2. Welcomes the initiative to take stock of social reality in the EU, and expects to have a clearer picture on the social situation of women in particular;
 3. Stresses that women and children are the main victims of poverty and social exclusion, with more than 16% of the population at risk of poverty even after social transfers; points out that the risk is even greater in the case of immigrants, the elderly, the disabled and members of single-parent families;
 4. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to urgently and more effectively implement existing EU legislation in the employment and social policy field, giving special attention to gender equality requirements;

5. Notes that children are at an above-average risk of poverty in most Member States and that in some cases almost one in three children is in this situation, and that the rate is even greater among children living in large single-parent families, made up mostly of women, who are often unemployed;
6. Stresses the increasing importance of caring duties and work-life balance in sustaining family life;
7. Urges the Member States to enforce legislation which reconciles work and family life, helping parents to remain in the labour market or easily re-enter it;
8. Calls for the promotion of more child sensitive policies, including a better use of public resources to address the issue of investment in children and young people, even if that means shifting resources from other policy areas;
9. Notes that, on average, 15% of pupils drop out of the education system but that, in some countries, such as Portugal, this rate is as high as around 40%, which gives cause for concern as regards the education and training of young girls;
10. Stresses that there are a number of dimensions to poverty and social exclusion but that the most important of these are the economic situation of families, housing conditions, and access to education, to health care and to long-term care;
11. Notes with great concern that gender-based violence worsens women's social and political exclusion, thereby preventing them from enjoying their human rights; calls on the Member States to reinforce legislation and share good practices in this field;
12. Calls on the Commission to undertake an inquiry into the human and social consequences of mobility for economic reasons on the social status of women;
13. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take measures to guarantee the full enjoyment of human, social and political rights by all women working in another Member State;
14. Calls on the Commission to open a European debate about appropriate measures for ensuring the social inclusion of prostitutes as human beings, and also for abolishing prostitution which is an unacceptable infringement of human rights in the European Union;
15. Stresses the importance of maintaining quality public services, a solid public and universal social security system and high levels of social protection and quality employment combined with rights and of ensuring effective gender mainstreaming in the formulation and implementation of such public policies;
16. Stresses that support should be provided for productive sectors, micro-businesses, SMEs, small agricultural companies, family farm holdings and the social economy, taking account of their important contribution to creating jobs for women and enhancing their well-being;

17. Considers that Community policies should give priority to the creation of jobs with guaranteed workers' rights, especially for sections of the population most affected by unemployment, and above all for young people, whose unemployment rate is, in a number of countries, consistently higher than 20% and, on average, twice as high as overall unemployment, the highest rate being among young girls;
18. Urges the Commission and the Member States to give maximum priority to women's social integration and women's rights, by altering their respective policies accordingly, including income distribution policy;
19. Stresses, in particular, the need to support less favoured regions, areas with permanent structural disadvantages, the outermost regions and areas suffering from recent deindustrialisation, industrial conversion or mine closures in order to strengthen economic and social cohesion and women's social integration.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	2.10.2007
Result of final vote	+: 22 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Katerina Batzeli, Edit Bauer, Ilda Figueiredo, Věra Flasarová, Claire Gibault, Lissy Gröner, Esther Herranz García, Lívia Járóka, Piia-Noora Kauppi, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Urszula Krupa, Esther De Lange, Roselyne Lefrancois, Siiri Oviir, Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, Zita Pleštinšská, Amalia Sartori, Eva-Britt Svensson, Anne Van Lancker, Anna Záborská
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Gabriela Crețu, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, Kartika Tamara Liotard
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	9.10.2007
Result of final vote	+ : 32 - : 1 0 : 0
Members present for the final vote	Jan Andersson, Alexandru Athanasiu, Jean-Luc Bennahmias, Iles Braghetto, Philip Bushill-Matthews, Ole Christensen, Derek Roland Clark, Jean Louis Cottigny, Harald Ettl, Richard Falbr, Ilda Figueiredo, Roger Helmer, Stephen Hughes, Karin Jöns, Ona Juknevičienė, Jan Jerzy Kułakowski, Jean Lambert, Raymond Langendries, Bernard Lehideux, Elizabeth Lynne, Thomas Mann, Jan Tadeusz Masiel, Maria Matsouka, Elisabeth Morin, Csaba Óry, José Albino Silva Peneda, Kathy Sinnott, Jean Spautz, Ewa Tomaszewska, Anne Van Lancker, Gabriele Zimmer
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Françoise Castex, Richard Howitt, Rumiana Jeleva, Dieter-Lebrecht Koch, Jamila Madeira, Mario Mantovani, Tatjana Ždanoka
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	