



2015/2223(INI)

29.1.2016

OPINION

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on meeting the antipoverty target in the light of increasing household costs
(2015/2223(INI))

Rapporteur (*): Julie Ward

(*) Associated committee – Rule 54 of the Rules of Procedure

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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 into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas there are 12 million more women than men living in conditions of poverty in the EU; whereas women and their dependent children are disproportionately at risk of poverty or social exclusion across the EU, with the economic crisis and austerity policies exacerbating these inequalities, leading to a 'feminisation of poverty'; whereas income distribution within households is unequal and gendered for various reasons, including a large proportion of women working in precarious or undeclared work, gender-based violence, and economic dependency, requiring individualised measurements of income and costs; whereas large families incur greater costs and burdens and dependent children, elderly people, or other vulnerable persons who depend on women's informal caregiving are also disproportionately at risk of poverty and social exclusion;
- B. whereas a strong new political impetus is required if the 2020 poverty targets are to be met; whereas the aggregate of current national poverty reduction targets falls eight million people short of the 2020 target; whereas the review of the 2020 strategy is the appropriate time for a firm renewed commitment to the elimination of poverty and social exclusion, and the reform and realignment of national strategies;
- C. whereas the gender gaps in remuneration, working hours and duration of working lives that women faced during their working lives have a direct effect on their lives as pensioners; whereas, women above the age of 65, have a substantially higher risk of poverty or social exclusion than their male counterparts, as the average pension income of a woman is currently lower, and often substantially so, than that of a man;
- D. whereas the intersectionality of the gender aspects of poverty requires a holistic approach to tackle multiple discrimination, and issues such as housing, energy costs, public services, job security, precarious employment, and taxation policies;
- E. whereas the anti-poverty targets cannot be met unless female poverty is tackled, as gender equality and the economic empowerment and the emancipation of women are necessary for upward convergence in poverty reduction;
- F. whereas, the increase in household costs affects certain groups in particular, such as single-parent families, elderly women, women migrants and persons with disabilities, while levels of welfare support differ from one Member State to another, and that support does not always guarantee an adequate level of assistance;
- G. whereas data collection and policymaking on poverty, living costs and income on the basis of households as constituent units assumes uniformity and equal distribution of resources between members of the household; whereas, in practice, households vary, and distribution can be unequal and gendered, requiring an approach to policymaking based on individual costs and income;

- H. whereas the cost for basic and essential goods and services, in many EU countries, has increased rapidly during the last years, leading to an increase in general household expenditures;
- I. whereas 17 % of single-parent households, overwhelmingly headed by women, are unable to keep their houses warm, compared with only 10% of the general population; whereas wholesale energy prices have decreased, while retail prices have increased, pushing costs upwards; whereas an EU-wide definition of energy poverty is regrettably lacking, while the phenomenon affects women disproportionately;
- J. whereas unemployment rates among young women are higher than other age groups, putting young women at risk of falling into poverty from an early age;
- K. whereas while rising household costs and the overburden of housing costs are one of the drivers of women's homelessness, more research is required on the rates and causes of women losing or leaving their homes; whereas household and individual indebtedness is directly related to household costs, and is a key driver of poverty and social exclusion;
- L. whereas, according to the Concluding Observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, reports on certain European countries show that there is a correlation between the increase in poverty rates and/or the risk of poverty for children as a consequence of the economic crisis and the cuts in social benefits, thereby affecting the rights of children to education, health and social protection;
- M. whereas poverty and social exclusion, including gender-based exclusion, should not only be defined in terms of income, material deprivation and work intensity, but also in terms of what the individual requires in order to live in dignity and participate actively in society in cultural, social, and political terms;
1. Expresses deep concern at the Commission's assessment that the 2020 anti-poverty target 'seems out of reach' and insists on fresh political impetus for practical, resolute and binding action from the Commission in close collaboration with the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) and the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) to tackle poverty in the EU, requiring a holistic EU-wide poverty strategy highlighting the gender aspects of poverty and strategies taking particular account of the needs of families facing poverty and of the situation of single parents; notes a slight yet insufficient increase in female labour-market participation over recent years which requires additional measures; calls on the Member States to ensure that national poverty strategies are gender mainstreamed and address gender inequality;
 2. Highlights the growing gap in poverty between the Member States across the Union, and the increase in extreme poverty, notably female poverty, particularly in crisis-hit countries and regions;
 3. Urges the Member States to rectify their national poverty strategies in a coordinated fashion so that the European target can be met; calls on the Member States to ensure that national poverty strategies are gender mainstreamed and address gender inequality; requests that each Member State provide a detailed trajectory of its poverty-reduction plan, and how its strategy addresses gender-specific aspects of poverty and social exclusion;

4. Calls for a Council recommendation to tackle poverty which includes a strong gender perspective;
5. Emphasises that poverty is generational and self-reproducing, requiring an intersectional holistic long-term approach to policymaking, taking into account costs and income, as well as public services provision; insists that poverty and social exclusion must be evaluated and tackled throughout the lifecycle, from childhood through to old age;
6. Considers that women's longer life expectancy must also be taken into account as a potential factor in vulnerability and exclusion;
7. Notes that the gender pay and pension gap are key contributors to female poverty; notes the long-term impacts on female poverty of women's exclusion from sectors of the economy traditionally dominated by men, such as technology, science, senior management and decision-making, and the over-representation of women in comparatively low-wage sectors such as care work, public services, part-time work, and low-paid precarious work; expresses concern that the feminisation of poverty is partially driven by long-standing gender-unequal norms, which lead to the prioritisation of male dominated sectors, such as the financial sector, in industrial policy and wage-setting agreements;
8. Reiterates that children are at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion due to female poverty, particularly in single-parent households, leading to greater long-term socio-economic inequalities;
9. Urges the Commission to incorporate a more robust social dimension and a gender pillar in the European Semester, and to include country-specific recommendations (CSRs) which address the gender aspects of poverty; calls on the Commission to ensure policy coherence so that social and economic policies complement rather than counteract one another and to identify gender-specific indicators in the field of poverty eradication;
10. Invites the Commission to give a clear and ambitious definition of a 'Triple A Social' rating for Europe, which includes a clear strategy for combating gendered aspects of social exclusion;
11. Reiterates the importance of the empowerment of women and girls through education, including formal and non-formal education, and the role of education in combating gender stereotypes and in combating the stigmatisation of poverty and in increasing income through women's inclusion in sectors where they have been under-represented such as science, technology, engineering, and entrepreneurship, and calls on the Commission to incorporate vocational training targets for women in the country-specific recommendations;
12. Notes that economic and financial education at a young age has been shown to improve economic decision-making later in life, including in managing costs and incomes; recommends the exchange of best practice and the promotion of educational programmes targeting women and girls in vulnerable groups and marginalised communities facing poverty and social exclusion;
13. Stresses that in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, targeted policies must be

deployed to address the particular circumstances of vulnerable groups and marginalised communities facing specific forms of gender inequality and multiple discrimination; calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue to develop policies addressing the poverty and social exclusion faced by women with disabilities, elderly women, refugee and migrant women, Roma women, and women from ethnic minorities, women in rural areas and in deprived neighbourhoods, single mothers, as well as female college and university students;

14. Calls on the Member States to undertake gender impact assessments of the recession in order to track subsequent changes over time, given the fact that women are likely to be disproportionately affected by future cuts in public spending and services;
15. Calls for more ambitious action to tackle energy poverty, which disproportionately affects single women, single-parent and female-headed households;
16. Urges the Commission and the Member States to establish a definition of energy poverty which takes into account gendered aspects of the phenomenon, and to include it in the future recast of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive;
17. Notes that increasing energy efficiency, renovation, and renewable energy is key to tackling energy poverty; expresses concern that housing renovation policies often fail to target those who are most vulnerable; insists that housing renovation policies must target poor, economically excluded and vulnerable households first and foremost, with an emphasis on those facing gender inequalities and multiple discrimination;
18. Highlights the role of local authorities in tackling energy poverty, and the potential of alternative funding mechanisms such as cooperatives and mutuals in alleviating the distress of vulnerable consumers;
19. Considers that policy on energy poverty at EU, national, and local levels must strive to empower the most vulnerable consumers, particularly those facing gender inequalities and multiple discrimination, and guarantee equitable pricing overall; calls on the Commission to make cohesion and structural funds, including the European Social Fund, available to tackle energy poverty; calls on the Commission to extend the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived beyond 2020 and to evaluate the extent to which the most deprived and vulnerable groups, such as younger women, single-parent families, the disabled and elderly women have benefited from the programme;
20. Emphasises that cuts to public services increase gender inequality, and that investment in high-quality services has the potential to reduce inequalities; stresses that macroeconomic policy must be compatible with social equality policy, and that it must include a strong gender perspective;
21. Highlights the importance of access to financial services and information for women's economic empowerment and social inclusion; emphasises the need to ease women's access to financial services in the form of favourable interest rates and streamlined procedures and information for women in vulnerable groups and marginalised communities;
22. Calls on financial institutions such as the ECB and national central banks to take into

account social impacts, including impacts on gender inequalities, when modelling and deciding on of macroeconomic monetary policies;

23. Urges a move towards the individualisation of rights in social equality policy, where costs and income are calculated, and relevant data collected on an individual basis, rather than in terms of household;
24. Reiterates the need for investment in sustainable and inclusive growth at national and European levels, and the need for gender budgeting in all areas of public policy and social investment;
25. Calls on the Commission, European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and the Member States to undertake research into female homelessness and its causes and drivers, as the phenomenon is captured inadequately in current data; notes that gender-specific elements that ought to be taken into account include gender-based economic dependency, temporary housing, or avoidance of social services;
26. Calls on the Commission to take steps to tackle the over-indebtedness faced by women in poor and excluded households, by combating loan-sharks and payday loans, predatory and excessive interest rates, and other abusive practices, and by facilitating sound financial advice, and social debt restructuring;
27. Points out the important role of social enterprise and alternative business models such as cooperatives and mutuals in facilitating social inclusion and the economic empowerment of women, particularly in marginalised communities, and their increased economic independence;
28. Supports the initiative to formulate a guideline reference budget, and calls on the Commission to include gender-specific considerations when designing it, including the gender inequalities faced within households;
29. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to address female poverty and social exclusion through initiatives to guarantee high-quality jobs with a living wage in female-dominated sectors; highlights the role that trade unions can play in the representation and empowerment of women in the work place and in combating exclusion; calls on the Member States to propose and conduct employer-specific and sector-specific salary surveys in order to demonstrate the unequal salary schemes that affect women and men at the same workplace as a means of accelerating the progress towards equal pay;
30. Invites the Commission and the Member States to create stakeholder engagement and deliberative processes that promote and facilitate the direct engagement of persons at risk of poverty and social inclusion, particularly women and girls, in policymaking on social inclusion at all levels.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	28.1.2016						
Result of final vote	<table><tr><td>+: </td><td>18</td></tr><tr><td>–: </td><td>11</td></tr><tr><td>0: </td><td>0</td></tr></table>	+:	18	–:	11	0:	0
+:	18						
–:	11						
0:	0						
Members present for the final vote	Daniela Aiuto, Maria Arena, Catherine Bearder, Malin Björk, Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, Iratxe García Pérez, Mary Honeyball, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Vicky Maeijer, Angelika Mlinar, Angelika Niebler, Maria Noichl, Marijana Petir, Terry Reintke, Jordi Sebastià, Ernest Urtasun, Beatrix von Storch, Jadwiga Wiśniewska, Jana Žitňanská						
Substitutes present for the final vote	Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Stefan Eck, Eleonora Forenza, Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz, Kostadinka Kuneva, Constance Le Grip, Clare Moody, Julie Ward						
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Pedro Silva Pereira, Claudiu Ciprian Tănăsescu, Kristina Winberg						