

Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty

European Parliament resolution of 9 October 2008 on promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, including child poverty, in the EU (2008/2034(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission Communication 'Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market' (COM(2007)0620),
- 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 by the Commission Services on the outcome of that consultation,
- having regard to Council Recommendation 92/441/EEC of 24 June 1992 on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems¹ and to Council Recommendation 92/442/EEC of 27 July 1992 on the convergence of social protection objectives and policies²,
- having regard to the Commission's opinion on an equitable wage (COM(1993)0388),
- having regard to the national Lisbon reform programmes, the national reports on strategies for social protection and social inclusion 2006-2008 and updates 2007 as presented by the Member States,
- having regard to the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008 (COM(2008)0042) and the Joint Employment Report 2007/2008 adopted by the Council on 13 and 14 March 2008,
- having regard to the Social Protection Committee Task Force Report on Child Poverty and Well-being in the EU of January 2008,
- having regard to the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966,
- having regard to Articles 3, 16, 18, 23, 25, 26 and 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to United Nations General Assembly Resolutions A/RES/46/121, A/RES/47/134, A/RES/47/196, A/RES/49/179, and A/RES/50/107,
- having regard to United Nations Economic and Social Council documents E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13, E/CN.4/1987/NGO/2, E/CN.4/1987/SR.29 and E/CN.4/1990/15,

¹ OJ L 245, 26.8.1992, p. 46.

² OJ L 245, 26.8.1992, p. 49.

E/CN.4/1996/25 and E/CN.4/Sub.2/RES/1996/25,

- having regard to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979,
- having regard to the UN Millennium Development Goals of 2000, particularly the elimination of poverty and hunger (first goal), the attainment of universal basic education (second goal), equal opportunities for men and women (third goal) and protection of the environment (seventh goal),
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (UNRC), and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography,
- having regard to the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families of 1990,
- having regard to the UN International Plan of Action on Ageing of 2002,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006 and its Optional Protocol,
- having regard to ILO Convention Nos 26 and 131 on minimum wage fixing,
- having regard to the UN and ILO's decent work agenda;
- having regard to the Commission Communication 'Promoting decent work for all: The EU contribution to the implementation of the decent work agenda in the world' (COM(2006)0249) and to Parliament's resolution of 23 May 2007 on promoting decent work for all¹,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Informal Meeting of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs in Berlin on 18 to 20 January 2007 on 'good work',
- having regard to Articles 34, 35 and 36 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 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 Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights for Workers of 1989 and the Revised European Social Charter of the Council of Europe of 1996,
- having regard to the European social partners' recommendations in the report entitled Key Challenges Facing European Labour Markets: A Joint Analysis of European Social Partners, of 18 October 2007,
- 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 origin² and Parliament's resolution of 28 April 2005 on the situation of the Roma in the European Union³,

¹ OJ C 102 E, 24.4.2008, p. 321.

² OJ L 180, 19.7.2000, p. 22.

³ OJ C 45 E, 23.2.2006, p. 129.

- having regard to Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 5 June 2003 on the application of the open method of coordination²,
- having regard to the Commission Communication Social reality stocktaking – Interim report to the 2007 Spring European Council (COM(2007)0063) and to Parliament's resolution of 15 November 2007 on Social Reality Stocktaking³,
- having regard to the Commission Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child' (COM(2006)0367) and to Parliament's resolution thereon of 16 January 2008⁴, in particular paragraphs 94 to 117 thereof,
- having regard to the Commission Communication 'A renewed commitment to social Europe: Reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and social Inclusion' (COM(2008)0418),
- having regard to the Commission's proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010), (COM(2007)0797), and to Parliament's position thereon, adopted on 17 June 2008⁵,
- having regard to its declaration of 22 April 2008 on ending street homelessness⁶,
- having regard to the findings and recommendations contained in the UN Secretary-General's landmark Study on Violence against Children of 2006, according to which economic inequalities and social exclusion are among the risk factors for child maltreatment,
- having regard to the European Economic and Social Committee's opinion of 9 July 2008, entitled A new European Social Action Programme,
- having regard to the Committee of the Region's opinion of 18 June 2008 entitled Active Inclusion,
- having regard to the Commission Communication 'Towards a European Charter on the Rights of Energy Consumers' (COM(2007)0386),
- having regard to Articles 136 to 145 of the EC Treaty,
- 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 opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0364/2008),

¹ OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16.

² OJ C 68 E, 18.3.2004, p. 604.

³ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2007)0541.

⁴ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0012.

⁵ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0286.

⁶ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0163.

- A. whereas the Nice European Council of 7 to 9 December 2000 set the EU objective of achieving a decisive and measurable reduction in poverty and social exclusion by the year 2010; whereas progress towards that objective should be improved,
- B. whereas the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000 agreed to eradicate child poverty in Europe by 2010,
- C. whereas the Nice European Council of 7 to 9 December 2000 called on the Member States to ensure a follow-up to the 1992 recommendation on minimum guaranteed resources to be provided by social protection systems,
- D. whereas Council Recommendation 92/441/EEC recognises 'the basic right of a person to sufficient resources and social assistance to live in a manner compatible with human dignity',
- E. whereas the Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights for Workers 1989 recognises a workers' right to 'an equitable wage'; whereas in 1993 Parliament and the Commission addressed the need for coordinated policies on minimum wages in order to implement this right of workers to a wage 'sufficient to enable them to have a decent standard of living',
- F. whereas at the start of the Union's commitment to combat poverty and social exclusion in 2001, 55 million people in the Union lived at risk of income poverty (15% of the population of EU-15); whereas in 2005 that figure had risen to 78 million (16% of the population of EU-25),
- G. whereas the persistent gender pay gap puts women in a weaker position when it comes to escaping poverty,
- H. whereas in the absence of all social transfers, the poverty risk in the Union, especially for women, would increase from 16% to 40%, or 25% excluding pension payments,
- I. whereas the shorter, slower and less well paid careers of women also have an impact on their risk of falling into poverty, especially for the over-65s (21% or 5 points percentage more than men),
- J. whereas children and young people make up almost one third of the population of the Union and 19 million children are at risk of poverty, many of them being separated from their family because of the family's poverty; whereas there is a complex relationship between poverty, parenting and children's well-being in diverse social circumstances, including the protection of children from all types of abuse,
- K. whereas in particular extreme poverty and social exclusion constitute a violation of all human rights,
- L. whereas a sizable part of the Union's population remains socially excluded, since one in five live in sub-standard housing and each day about 1,8 million people seek accommodation in specialist shelters for homeless, 10% live in households where nobody works, long-term unemployment approaching 4%, 31 million workers or 15% are earning extremely low wages, 8% of workers or 17 million experience income poverty despite employment, the proportion of early school leavers is over 15% and the digital divide still persists (44% of

the EU population lack any internet or computer skills),

- M. whereas poverty and inequality disproportionately affect women; whereas the average income of women is just 55% that of men; whereas women are highly and disproportionately affected by poverty in old age; whereas inability to gain access to high quality services increases the risk of poverty for women unacceptably,
- N. whereas regional and local authorities already have considerable responsibility for providing general public services and benefits, but are at the same time subject to the restrictive pressure of public budgets,
- O. whereas investing in children and young people helps raise economic prosperity for all and helps break the cycle of deprivation, and whereas it is essential to prevent problems and to intervene as soon as they are identified in order to preserve children's life chances,
- P. 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,
- Q. 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 the opportunities for future generations,
- R. whereas, in the period 2000 to 2005, income inequality in the Union (S80/S20 ratio) rose remarkably from 4,5 to 4,9 according to the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) data, so that in 2005 the richest 20% of the Union's population had an income nearly 5 times higher than that of the remaining 80% of the population,
- S. whereas imprisonment without adequate rehabilitation and education often only leads to further social exclusion and unemployment,
- T. whereas 16% of the Union's total working population is disabled (Eurostat 2002); whereas unemployment levels among disabled people, which includes people with mental health problems, some older people and ethnic minorities across the Union remain unacceptably high; whereas 500 000 disabled people still live in large closed residential institutions,

A more holistic approach to active social inclusion

1. Welcomes the Commission's approach to active social inclusion; considers that the overarching aim of active social inclusion policies must be to implement fundamental rights in order to enable people to live with dignity and participate in society and the labour market;
2. Considers that active social inclusion policies must make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion, both for those in employment (the 'working poor') and for those not in paid employment; agrees with the Commission that a more holistic approach to active social inclusion should be based on the following common principles:

- (a) income support sufficient to prevent social exclusion: Member States should, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, define minimum income schemes, related benefits and social assistance which should be easily accessible and provide sufficient resources, and should accompany these with a strategic plan for active inclusion policies in order to lift people out of poverty and prevent social exclusion (noting that active inclusion policies comprise greater equity of social protection systems and also provide specific flanking measures (e.g. rehabilitation, training, counselling, childcare, housing, language training for immigrants and support services) to enable people to lead a dignified life);
 - (b) a link to inclusive labour markets: active inclusion policies should aim at fostering stable and secure highly skilled jobs, improving the attractiveness of jobs, creating quality jobs and promoting quality in employment, providing a high level of health and safety at work, increasing productivity and active support for the most disadvantaged, providing specific support measures and services to increase employability and helping to keep people in the job market, developing entrepreneurial activity and providing job search assistance, high-quality education, vocational training, further training and lifelong learning, personalised counselling, special assistance and subsidised employment where absolutely necessary for vulnerable groups such as workers with disabilities;
 - (c) a link to better access to quality services: the accessibility, affordability, openness, transparency, universality, and quality of essential services (social services, services of general (economic) interest) must be strengthened in order to promote social and territorial cohesion, guarantee fundamental rights and ensure a decent existence, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society, such as disabled people, elderly people, single-parent families and large families, and services should be designed in ways which take into account the needs of different groups; the further privatisation of public and social services must be avoided unless affordability, quality and accessibility to all citizens are ensured;
 - (d) gender mainstreaming, anti-discrimination and active participation: active inclusion policies must ensure the promotion of equality between men and women and contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination in all the aspects of active social inclusion mentioned above; active participation: good governance, participation and integration of all relevant actors should be promoted by directly involving those affected by poverty, social exclusion and inequality at both national and European levels – and particularly people living in situations of extreme poverty – as well as the social partners, non-governmental organisations and the media in the development, management, implementation and evaluation of strategies;
3. Considers that Council Recommendation 92/441/EEC needs to be broadened and updated in the light of the results of the Union's social reality stocktaking and the proposed holistic approach to active inclusion, and also that that Recommendation should take due account of the emergence of new social risks linked to demographic change and the knowledge-based and service economy;
4. Endorses the Commission's view that a more holistic approach to active inclusion should also include a special focus on the eradication of child poverty, on the elimination of inequalities concerning access to health care and health outcomes, on tackling poverty and

social exclusion linked to public and private pensions and retirement, and on the provision of decent high-quality long-term care;

Guaranteeing sufficient income to ensure a dignified life for all

5. Points out that most Member States in EU-27 have national minimum income schemes, but several do not; encourages the Member States to provide for guaranteed minimum income schemes for social inclusion, and urges them to exchange best practice; recognises that, where there is provision of social assistance, Member States have a duty to ensure that citizens understand and are able to obtain their entitlements;
6. Deeply regrets that some Member States appear not to have regard to Council Recommendation 92/441/EEC, which recognises the 'basic right of a person to sufficient resources and social assistance to live in a manner compatible with human dignity';
7. Agrees with the Commission that social assistance in most Member States is already below a level which makes poverty a risk ; insists that the central objective of income support schemes must be to lift people out of poverty and enable them to live in dignity; calls on the Commission to examine whether an unconditional basic income for all could be an effective tool for combating poverty;
8. Calls on the Commission to provide a detailed report on whether welfare provision in the Member States (inter alia, minimum income schemes and related benefits, unemployment, invalidity and survivors' benefits, statutory and supplementary pension schemes, early retirement benefits) provide for incomes above the Union's at-risk-of poverty threshold of 60% of national median equalised income;
9. Suggests that the Commission should consider establishing a common method of calculating the minimum subsistence amount and the cost of living (a basket of goods and services) in order to ensure comparable measurements of the poverty line and define the criterion for necessary social intervention;
10. Points out that the risk of falling into extreme poverty is greater for women than for men; points out that the persistent trend towards feminisation of poverty in European societies today demonstrates that the current framework of social protection systems and the wide range of social, economic and employment policies in the Union are not designed to meet women's needs or to address the differences in women's work; underlines the fact that poverty among women and their social exclusion in Europe requires specific, multiple and gender-specific policy responses;
11. States that adequate minimum income schemes are a fundamental prerequisite for a European Union based on social justice and equal opportunities for all; calls on the Member States to ensure that an adequate minimum income is provided for periods out of work or in between jobs, with particular attention being paid to groups of women that have additional responsibilities;
12. Calls on the Council to agree an EU target for minimum income schemes and contributory replacement income schemes of providing income support of at least 60% of national median equalised income and, further, to agree a timetable for achieving this target in all Member States;

13. Considers that the risk of falling into poverty is greater for women than for men, particularly in old age, because social security systems are often based on the principle of continuous remunerated employment; calls for an individualised right to an adequate minimum income which is not conditional on employment related contributions;
14. Considers that poverty affecting those who are already employed does not reflect equitable working conditions, and calls for efforts to be concentrated on remedying this state of affairs in such a way that remuneration in general and especially minimum wages – be they of a statutory nature or collectively agreed – is such as to prevent income poverty and ensure a decent standard of living;
15. Calls on the Council to agree an EU target for minimum wages (statutory, collective agreements at national, regional or sectoral level) to provide for remuneration of at least 60% of the relevant (national, sectoral, etc.) average wage and, further, to agree a timetable for achieving that target in all Member States;
16. Points out that minimum income schemes should be complemented by a package of support measures to facilitate social inclusion, such a package including facilities for social inclusion, for example in housing, as well as support for education, training and professional re-training and lifelong learning, as well as sound economic management and income support schemes, to contribute towards covering the costs to individuals and households, in such a way as to ensure the satisfaction of living needs and lifelong education needs, in particular for single persons, single-parent families and large families;
17. Calls on the Member States to examine their often complex and entangled mesh of income support schemes, whatever their specific nature (be they minimum income schemes and related benefits, contributory replacement income schemes or whatever), with a view to improving their accessibility, effectiveness and efficiency;
18. Considers that the Member States should provide targeted additional benefits for disadvantaged groups (such as people with disabilities or chronic diseases, single parents, or households with many children) which cover extra costs in connection, inter alia, with personal support, the use of specific facilities and medical and social care, establishing inter alia affordable price levels for medicines for less-favoured social groups; stresses the need to ensure decent invalidity and retirement pension levels;
19. Recognises the unequal distribution of income among self-employed people and the fact that a quarter of self-employed people live below the poverty line and, therefore, that more institutionalised support needs to be given to entrepreneurs to avoid the poverty trap;

Eradicating child poverty: from analysis to targeted policies and implementation

20. Highlights the importance of a holistic approach to the material security and well-being of children, based on the UNRC child rights-centred perspective, so that families, and especially large families, can benefit from sufficient income levels to give their children adequate housing and an adequate diet, as well as access to high quality health, social and education services, with a view to their harmonious development in both physical and personality terms; recognises, however, that children's fundamental needs should take priority over Member States' financial considerations;
21. Calls on the EU institutions, the Member States and organised civil society associations to

ensure that child participation is always organised according to the fundamental principles of safe and meaningful participation;

22. Draws attention to the following dimensions of a holistic approach:

- (a) **recognising that children and young people are citizens and independent holders of rights as well as being part of a family;**
- (b) ensuring that children grow up with the support of resources and every form of assistance to meet all aspects of their emotional, social, physical, educational and cognitive needs, providing in particular essential support for parents and families living in extreme poverty, so that they can acquire the resources to fulfil their responsibilities, and thus preventing the abandonment or institutionalisation of children by parents in difficult material circumstances;
- (c) providing access to services and opportunities that are necessary for all children to enhance their present and future well-being; also paying special attention to children in need of special support (ethnic minorities, immigrants, street children and children with disabilities), enabling them to reach their full potential and preventing situations of vulnerability from arising, in particular multigenerational poverty, also by ensuring that children have access to education and health care;
- (d) allowing children to participate in society, including in decisions appropriate to their age that directly affect their lives, as well as in social, recreational, sporting and cultural life;
- (e) granting financial aid to large families, with a view to helping arrest population decline, as well as aid for single parents raising one child or more, together with measures to facilitate their entry into or return to the labour market, recalling that this situation is more and more widespread and that the difficulties facing parents in such circumstances are far greater than those facing two-parent families;
- (f) recognising the role that families play in the well-being and development of children;
- (g) Stresses the importance of supporting the reuniting of street children, trafficked children and unaccompanied minors with their families, considering in each case the best interests of the child; emphasises that reunion should be accompanied by special measures of social reintegration where the socio-economic situation has led the child to engage in illicit income-generating activities which are harmful to the child's physical and moral development, such as prostitution and drug dealing; calls for joint coordinated action addressing the root causes of the extreme marginalisation and poverty of street children and their families, improving their access to quality services and combating organised crime; calls on the Council to agree on an EU-wide commitment based on Parliament's resolution of 16 January 2008 'Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child' to make sure that by 2015, no children have to live in the street;
- (h) Encourages the Member States to recognise that the vicious circle of extreme poverty, vulnerability, discrimination and social exclusion puts children, and particularly street children, at particular risk and that differentiated and individualised actions are required to address multiple deprivations; urges the

Member States to endorse an EU joint effort to stop child trafficking and prostitution, child drug addiction, violence against children and juvenile delinquency;

23. Calls on the Commission to consider child poverty and social exclusion in a broader context of EU policy making, including issues such as immigration, disability, discrimination, protection of children from all forms of maltreatment and abuse, child and adult carers, equality between men and women, family support, active social inclusion, early-years care and education, life-long learning and the reconciliation of working life, non-working life and family life;
24. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to implement effectively the principle of equal payment for work of equal social value and to carry out a specific analysis and reform of social protection systems and to develop EU guidelines to reform social protection systems from a gender equality perspective, including the individualisation of rights to social security, adapting social protection and services to changing family structures and ensuring that social protection systems better counteract the precarious situation of women and meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups of women;
25. Calls on the Commission to improve benchmarking and monitoring in the Open Method of Coordination, to establish common indicators and to collect comparable high-quality data and long-term statistics on the situation of children, covering all aspects of a holistic approach to combating child poverty and social exclusion, including the housing of children and families, in order to be able to monitor children's well-being;
26. Encourages Eurostat to establish a link with the set of indicators that is being developed to monitor the impact of EU action on children's rights and welfare, commissioned by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights; points to the need for a joint effort of the Commission, the fundamental rights agency and the Member States to work in cooperation with relevant UN agencies, international organisations and research centres towards improving the collection of comparable statistical data on the situation of children in the Union, a need which it mentioned in its abovementioned resolution of 16 January 2008; calls on the Member States to take all possible measures to comply with the recommendation expressed in the Social Protection Committee's Report on Child Poverty and Well-being in Europe, adopted on 17 January 2008, which stresses that Member States should review the various sources of data available at national and regional levels on children in vulnerable situations;
27. Urges the Member States to put in place preventive systems to detect critical situations, such as where parents are about to lose their home, the abrupt removal of children from school, or cases of abuse suffered by parents during their own childhood; calls on the Member States to pursue an active policy aimed at preventing children from leaving school early, through mechanisms which provide support for groups at risk;
28. Urges those Member States which have not yet done so, to devolve to their local authorities the power to set up and run systems to assist children in trouble, in order to ensure that they are as efficient as possible;
29. Supports the Commission's view that a balance between targeting the diversity of modern family structures and targeting the rights of the child achieves the best outcomes in combating child poverty;

30. Calls on the Commission to promote a well-balanced policy mix adequately resourced and underpinned by clear objectives and targets that takes into account the specific national context and focuses on early intervention;
31. Calls on the Member States to strengthen the mutual learning process and their monitoring of successful and unsuccessful policies to combat child poverty and social exclusion;
32. Stresses the importance of integrated, holistic family policies going beyond active inclusion to address all aspects of child and family well-being and to eradicate child poverty and social exclusion in the Union;
33. Calls on the Member States to exchange best practices on children's participation and to promote the involvement of children in decisions concerning their own future, as this is the best way to get a children's perspective;
34. Welcomes the Commission's and Member States' commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; calls on the Commission and Member States to establish a clear connection between the children's rights agenda and the agenda to combat child poverty and exclusion, as child poverty and deprivation is a violation of fundamental human rights; encourages Member States to have regard to the recommendations of the Convention Committee in response to the implementation reports from State parties and non-governmental organisations alternative reports when preparing their social inclusion strategies;
35. Points out that single parents must not be placed in a worse position than couples with children as regards services and benefit payments;
36. Urges the Member States to develop national strategies for reducing and eradicating child poverty on the basis of a differentiated approach which takes into account variations in the level of poverty depending on the region and the age under consideration;
37. Calls on the Member States to ensure that all children and families, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, have access to high quality social care services which reflect a clear understanding of the impact of poverty on families, including the increased risks of, and impact of, child abuse and maltreatment;

Employment policies for socially inclusive labour markets

38. Agrees with the Commission that having a job is the best way to avoid poverty and social exclusion, but that it is not always a guarantee thereof, as, according to official statistics, 8% of workers in the Union are at risk of poverty; calls on the Commission and the Member States, therefore, to implement effectively Directive 2000/78/EC;
39. Calls on the Member States more effectively to implement existing Community legislation in the fields of employment and social affairs;
40. Points out that 20 million people in the Union, most of them women, are affected by in-work poverty, or, in other words, 6% of the total population and 36% of the working population are at in-work poverty risk; calls on the Member States to agree on minimum wage legislation as an integral element of active inclusion;

41. Stresses that the proportion of part-time employment in the Union is 31% for women and 7,4% for men; emphasises that part-time employment for women is often only petty and marginal part-time work with poor remuneration and insufficient social protection; points out that women are therefore at greater risk of falling into poverty, especially in old age, as pensions from part-time employment very often do not suffice to lead an independent life;
42. Considers that, for active inclusion in the labour market, the most disadvantaged groups need specific measures:
 - (i) supporting personal development, through education, training, lifelong learning, the acquisition of IT skills and assessment, as well as family stability, social integration and inclusion before employment, recognising that the individual's responsibility to integrate into society is of great importance and should be stimulated;
 - (ii) providing maximum access to information and personalised pathways to secure and stable, highly skilled employment in accordance with people's needs and capacities; eliminating the obstacles to people entering or returning to the labour market, with particular attention being paid to single-parent families, and promoting gradual retirement to increase elderly people's income levels and prevent their impoverishment;
 - (iii) supportive measures fostering employment and the ability to remain in the job market (e.g. on-the-job training and lifelong learning opportunities); developing entrepreneurship and also work arrangements that help marginalised people to enter the workplace or the job market and reconcile employment with their efforts to deal with social disadvantage (such as a lack of housing, care responsibilities or health problems);
 - (iv) monitoring the cessation of work by persons of retirement age in the interests of releasing posts;
43. Considers that make-work-pay policies should address the problem of the low-pay trap and the low-pay/no-pay cycle at the lower end of the labour market whereby individuals move between insecure, low-paid, low-quality, low-productivity jobs and unemployment and/or inactivity; stresses that the need for flexibility in unemployment and social benefits should be addressed as a matter of priority; considers that welfare systems should actively motivate people to look for new job opportunities while encouraging openness to change by mitigating income loss and providing opportunities for education; urges policy makers to use the concept of flexicurity in their 'make-work-pay' policies;
44. Calls on the Member States to rethink 'activation policies' that are based on too restrictive eligibility and conditionality rules for benefit recipients and force people into low quality jobs that do not provide a decent living standard;
45. Proposes that a balance be struck between the personal responsibility of individuals and the provision of social assistance, so as to enable everyone to live in dignity and participate in society;
46. Highlights the Council's position that active labour market policies should promote 'good work' and upward social mobility and provide stepping stones towards regular, gainful employment with adequate social protection and decent working conditions and

remuneration;

47. Highlights the potential of the social economy, social enterprises, the not-for-profit sector and the public employment sector to provide supported employment opportunities and working environments for vulnerable groups, which should be explored and supported to the fullest by the Member States and under Community policies (the European Social Fund, Regional and Cohesion Funds, etc.);
48. Agrees with the Commission that, for those who cannot work for various reasons (such as severe disability, age or incapacity, the impact of persistent and generational poverty and/or discrimination, the burden of family or caring responsibilities or local area deprivation), active inclusion policies must provide income support and supportive measures to prevent poverty and social exclusion and to enable such people to live in dignity and participate in society;
49. Calls on the Member States to reduce fiscal pressure not only on lower income earners but also on average income earners, so as to prevent workers from being caught in a low-wage trap and to deter recourse to undeclared work;
50. Draws attention to the social changes in Europe, which are altering the social make-up of households; calls for these changes to be taken into account with a view to eliminating barriers to the labour market for the non-working partners of unmarried cohabiting couples;
51. Considers that the social economy and social enterprises must provide decent working conditions and remuneration and also promote gender equality and anti-discrimination policies (such as closing the gender pay gap, adhering to collective agreements, paying minimum wages and ensuring equal treatment);
52. Notes that, despite welcome moves towards greater participation in higher education, the Member States should be encouraged to maintain and introduce work-based apprenticeships; calls on the Member States to develop consistent policies on traineeships that provide for minimum guarantees and decent remuneration and, furthermore, to combat the current trend of disguising jobs as unpaid traineeships;
53. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop a coherent approach across the education systems in the Union to the professional orientation process, based on similar coaching formulae that enable younger people to obtain training in work-oriented areas chosen by them as part of their career path; points out that training systems should be based on the mutual recognition of diplomas and vocational certificates and should include language instruction, with a view to eliminating communication barriers within the Union; considers that retraining measures should strike a balance between emotional and professional wellbeing, so that professional retraining is not seen as a handicap or an obstacle to professional development;
54. Draws attention to the need to promote the active inclusion of young people, older people and immigrants in all efforts to create an inclusive labour market; calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to draw up a set of urgent measures to combat undeclared work, forced child labour and the abusive exploitation of workers and to resolve the misleading confusion of economic migration with asylum seeking, and of both with illegal immigration; calls on the Member States to put forward legislation to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable workers by gang-masters and to sign and ratify the UN

Providing quality services and guaranteeing access for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups

55. Welcomes the Commission's view that statutory and complementary social security schemes, health services and social services of general interest must play a preventive and socially cohesive role, facilitate social inclusion and safeguard fundamental rights; points to the need to ensure the development of high-quality, accessible and affordable long-term care for those in need and support for those who provide the care; calls on the Member States to identify and address the problems faced by carers, who are often forced to remain outside the labour market;
56. Agrees with the Commission that all services of general interest, including network industries such as transport, telecommunication, energy and other public utilities and financial services should play an important role in ensuring social and territorial cohesion and should contribute to active inclusion;
57. Stresses that access to goods and services should be a right for every citizen of the Union and therefore welcomes the Commission's proposal for a horizontal directive complementing Directive 2000/78/EC and covering all forms of discrimination on the grounds set out in Article 13 of the EC Treaty, which should help to combat discrimination in areas of life other than employment, including discrimination based on disability, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation; at the same time considers that further progress should be made as regards the implementation of the existing Community anti-discrimination directives;
58. Encourages the Member States to consider social default tariffs for vulnerable groups for example in the fields of energy and public transport and also facilities for obtaining microcredits, so as to promote active inclusion, as well as free healthcare and education for people having difficulties of a material nature;
59. Encourages the Commission and the Member States to enhance universal service obligations (for example in the telecommunications and postal services sector) in order to strengthen the accessibility and affordability of essential services and also to enhance targeted public service obligations so as to address vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society;
60. Calls on the Council to agree an EU-wide commitment to end street homelessness by 2015 and calls for the development by Member States of integrated policies to ensure access to affordable quality housing for all; urges the Member States to devise 'winter emergency plans' as part of a wider homelessness strategy, as well as to establish agencies dedicated to enabling provision and access to housing for groups facing discrimination; suggests the collection of comparable data on the extent of homelessness and poor housing; calls on the Commission to develop an EU framework definition of homelessness and provide annual updates on action taken and progress made in the Member States towards ending homelessness;
61. Urges the Member States to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2012, such a reduction to be measured using indicators that are not solely economic, as a first commitment towards the eradication of child poverty in the Union, and to allocate sufficient resources in order to achieve this goal; considers that the indicators used to measure this reduction should take

particular account of children in families living in extreme poverty;

62. Highlights the importance of promoting integrated services that respond to the multidimensionality of poverty and social exclusion, addressing, for example, the link between poverty and homelessness, violence, health and mental health, education levels, social and community integration, lack of access to information technologies and infrastructure and the widening of the digital divide;
63. Calls on the Member States to adopt a health-in-all policies approach and to develop integrated social and health policies to combat inequalities in health care provision, prevention and health outcomes, especially as far as vulnerable groups and the most difficult to reach are concerned;
64. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote voluntary activities and to help with the social integration of people who have lost touch with or no longer participate in the labour market;
65. Welcomes the Commission's focus on better accessibility (availability and affordability) and better quality of services (user involvement, monitoring, performance evaluation, good working conditions, equality in recruitment policies and service provision, coordination and integration of services and adequate physical infrastructure);
66. Calls on the Member States to improve the coordination of public services, particularly the links between services for children and those for adults; urges the Member States to introduce assistance programmes for parents in various fields where poverty leads to a lack of knowledge with regard to bringing up children and to ensure that child helplines are sufficiently resourced; emphasises that public services for children and families must ensure that the right structures, incentives, performance management systems, funding streams and workforce are in place, that the front-line workforce has the right skills, knowledge and confidence to deliver better prevention and early intervention and that the services are responsive to users' needs, especially those of vulnerable families;
67. Calls on the Member States to attach greater importance to the fact that cuts in grants for specific services such as dinner money, free teaching materials and school buses, and for essential leisure and out-of-school educational opportunities, might lead to direct social exclusion, in particular for children from socially vulnerable families; highlights the need for Member States to provide equal opportunities for the integration of all children through an active sports policy in schools and access to information technologies; calls on the Commission to incorporate services for children such as child care, school transport and school meals in the list of general interest social services;
68. Welcomes the deinstitutionalisation of disabled people but notes that this requires the promotion of the provision of comprehensive community-based high-quality support and care services favouring independent living, the right to personal assistance, the right to control one's own budget and full participation in society;
69. Highlights the need for Member States to promote the development and implementation of comprehensive local, regional and national ageing strategies;
70. Believes that more action should be taken both at Member State and EU level to acknowledge, research and tackle domestic violence and the abuse of children and older

people;

71. Calls on the Member States to develop a more constructive approach to drugs policy, with the emphasis on education and treatment for addiction rather than criminal sanctions;
72. Calls on the Member States to prioritise public health measures which seek to tackle head-on the inequality that exists in the degree of health and of access to health care in many ethnic minority communities;
73. Notes that, in all Member States, alcohol and drug abuse can lead to crime, unemployment and social exclusion; believes it therefore unacceptable that, for many people, the only way to obtain such treatment and advice is through the prison system;
74. Stresses that there are many forms of disability, including mobility problems, visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental health problems, chronic illness and learning disabilities; highlights the fact that people with multiple disabilities have exceptional problems, as do people subjected to multiple discrimination;
75. Calls for the 'de-stigmatisation' of people with mental health problems and people with learning disabilities, the promotion of mental health and well being and the prevention of mental disorders as well as for increased resources for treatment and care;
76. Calls on the Member States to enforce anti-trafficking and anti-discrimination legislation and in particular to sign, ratify and implement the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings;
77. Urges all Member States to safeguard human-rights based asylum policy in accordance with the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and other relevant human rights law, whilst working to end the dependence of asylum seekers on benefits by allowing them to work, and to consider the development of more legal immigration routes;

Improving policy coordination and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders

78. Regrets that the Commission's Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008 does not provide a sufficiently strategic focus on eradicating poverty and overcoming social exclusion;
79. Agrees with the Commission that the active inclusion approach must promote an integrated implementation process at EU, national, regional and local levels, involving all relevant actors (social partners, NGOs, local and regional authorities, etc.) and also provide for the active participation of disadvantaged people themselves in the development, management, implementation and evaluation of strategies;
80. Stresses the need for a uniform series of measures at European level with a view to preventing and penalising abuses of any kind of minorities, people with disabilities and senior citizens, in the context of concrete actions for the across-the-board reduction of the vulnerability of those social groups, including in material terms;
81. Calls on the Council and the Commission to reinvigorate a clear strategic focus on the eradication of poverty and the promotion of social inclusion in the context of the Social Agenda 2008 to 2012; calls for a more explicit commitment in the next cycle of the Open

Method of Coordination in the fields of Social Protection and Social Inclusion, to a dynamic and effective Community strategy that would set meaningful targets and lead to the creation of effective instruments and to monitoring focused on fighting poverty, social exclusion and inequality; calls on the Council and the Commission to tackle the problems concerning the various coordination processes (Lisbon Strategy, EU strategy for sustainable development, the Open Method of Coordination in the fields of Social Inclusion and Social Protection) in such a way as to provide for a clear commitment towards the eradication of poverty and the promotion of social inclusion under all of these policies;

82. Calls on the Commission, the Social Protection Committee and the Member States to set up specific gender equality objectives and targets to combat poverty and social exclusion, including a set of policy actions to support groups of women facing a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion, such as non-traditional and one-parent families, immigrant women, refugee and ethnic minority women, older women and disabled women;
83. Encourages the social partners to continue with their efforts already started with the Joint Social Partner Analysis and their work programme 2006-2008 for the integration of disadvantaged people in the labour market; considers that better governance is needed to coordinate those labour market related activities of the social partners on the one hand and the broader civil dialogue (NGOs, etc.) on social inclusion beyond employment on the other hand;
84. Supports the Commission's view that, with regard to Recommendation 92/441/EEC and the Open Method of Coordination in the fields of Social Protection and Social Inclusion, there need to be appropriate indicators and comprehensive national systems for the collection and analysis of data (e.g. statistical data on the average disposable income, household consumption, the level of prices, minimum wages, minimum income schemes and related benefits); considers that the monitoring and assessment of the implementation of strategies for social inclusion and Member States' progress reports should demonstrate whether the basic right to sufficient resources and social assistance enabling people to live in dignity is respected in each Member State, also at regional level;
85. Welcomes the Commission's Communication 'A renewed commitment to Social Europe: Reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion' (COM(2008)0418), which proposes to strengthen the social OMC by improving its visibility and working methods and by strengthening its interaction with other policies; especially welcomes the Commission's proposals to set targets for the reduction of poverty (in general, child poverty, in-work poverty and persistent long-term poverty), for a minimum level of income provided through pensions and for access to and the quality of health care (reducing infant mortality, improving health and increasing life expectancy, etc.);
86. Calls on the Member States to take effective measures to achieve the Barcelona targets for childcare services; calls on the Commission and the Member States to formulate recommendations as to how to meet the need for care services in Europe (more particularly the organising and financing of care for children and other dependent persons), including setting precise targets and indicators, with the aim of providing childcare facilities across the Union for 90% of children from birth until mandatory school age and a sufficient level of care provision for other dependent persons by 2015; underlines the fact that all services

should meet the criteria of affordability, accessibility and good quality, so that bringing up children and caring for dependents is no longer a special 'poverty risk' for women;

87. Stresses that those furthest from the labour market should benefit more from Community programmes such as the European Social Fund and the EQUAL initiative; calls on the Commission to assess the contribution of the Structural Funds to the objectives of the Open Method of Coordination based on social inclusion indicators and to encourage the application of the provisions of the new European Social Fund regulation and the use of Progress funding to support active inclusion measures and explore possibilities for ring-fencing ESF funds or identifying a specific budget for a Community initiative in this area; believes that this will also foster the creation of networks of good practice in combating poverty and encourage exchanges of experience between the Member States;
88. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to commit themselves to the effective actions to be taken in the context of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, which should represent a substantial part of the long-term effort to combat poverty;
89. Calls on the Commission to support the meaningful and safe participation of children in all matters affecting them, ensuring that all children have an equal opportunity to be involved;

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90. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, and the Social Protection Committee.