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Combating poverty

Report¹

Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

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Summary

The recent increase in poverty, associated with an attendant increase in social exclusion, poses a threat to the full enjoyment of fundamental human rights by an increasingly large part of the population, as well as to the social cohesion of our societies.

A substantial review of public policy aimed at combating poverty has thus become an urgent need. Member states are invited to commit to end child poverty and absolute poverty in Europe by 2025. Poverty reduction strategies should be based on principles of human rights, ensuring, in particular, access to and full enjoyment of social rights by people who experience poverty.

The international human rights protection mechanisms, including the Council of Europe social rights protection instruments – such as the European Social Charter (revised) – and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies, should provide the basis for action in member states.

The effectiveness of measures taken to combat poverty and social exclusion should be regularly monitored to ensure that member states' strategies and actions meet the needs of people experiencing poverty, prevent people from falling into poverty and assist those who are in poverty to recover.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 12145](#), Reference 3651 of 12 March 2010.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly stresses the importance of safeguarding the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people, regardless of their economic situation.
2. The Assembly deplores the alarming increase in poverty in Europe in recent years, due, *inter alia*, to the economic crisis brought on by the financial crisis.
3. Poverty is a barrier to exercising human rights, be they political, civil, social, economic or cultural rights. The Assembly therefore fully endorses the principle according to which everyone has the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion.
4. Poverty generates, and leads to, lack of access to human rights, and can only be eliminated if poverty reduction strategies are based on human rights. The Council of Europe is thus a major actor in combating poverty as it provides the most effective human rights protection mechanisms in Europe.
5. The Assembly calls upon member states to:
 - 5.1. commit to ending poverty: after having committed to ending poverty by 2015 through the Millennium Development Goals, the moment has come to commit to ending child poverty and extreme poverty by 2025;
 - 5.2. raise the voice of people living in poverty: to consider developing new forms of governance and participation involving and empowering people who experience poverty, and promoting social inclusion for all;
 - 5.3. ensure that poverty reduction strategies are based on principles of human rights, securing, in particular, access to and full enjoyment of social rights by people who experience poverty;
 - 5.4. adopt a plan of action, including specific, quantified goals;
 - 5.5. strengthen international assistance and co-operation aimed at reducing poverty, in particular, through the Council of Europe standard-setting mechanisms in the field of social security;
 - 5.6. promote investment in human capital, business capital, infrastructure, natural capital, public institutional capital, and knowledge capital, as there is no security and development without investment;
 - 5.7. increase investment in education and schooling, with a view to raising the level of qualification of young people leaving the education system;
 - 5.8. take measures to enable, in particular, full access to employment opportunities, adequate medical assistance and housing, without discrimination;
 - 5.9. secure the right to fair remuneration through the provision of an adequate minimum wage, recognising the right of workers to a remuneration that gives them and their families a decent standard of living;
 - 5.10. provide minimum-income guarantees to ensure the social inclusion of people for whom employment is not an option or who do not have the capacity to work;
 - 5.11. ensure that strategies and actions meet the needs of people experiencing poverty, prevent them from falling into poverty by providing support in critical situations, and assist those who are in poverty to recover;
 - 5.12. adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to tackling poverty-related issues, taking due account of the responsibilities of those involved: trade unions, industry, finance, public governing bodies, civil society, etc.;
 - 5.13. contribute to the development of science in order to find new solutions and to address the unmet needs of people living in poverty;
 - 5.14. contribute to strengthening social cohesion through volunteering as an additional means to combat poverty;
 - 5.15. prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty, in particular through the promotion of intergenerational solidarity and family cohesion;
 - 5.16. adopt a positive attitude, with the aim of promoting prosperity and improving well-being for all.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 22 March 2011.

6. The European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) is the most advanced human rights protection instrument that foresees protection against poverty amongst its provisions. Article 30 on the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion should therefore become one of the core provisions of the European Social Charter (revised), under Article A, paragraph 1*b*, and all Council of Europe member states should agree to be bound by this provision. Countries should aim for the ratification and implementation of the European Social Charter (revised) in its entirety.
7. The Assembly strongly supports the Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies proposed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) and invites member states to take due account of the Guidelines in their public policymaking and relevant budgetary decisions.
8. The Assembly invites national parliaments to further promote the signature, ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe social rights protection instruments, namely the European Social Charter (revised) and protocols thereto; the European Convention on Social Security (ETS No. 78), the Supplementary Agreement for the Application thereof (ETS No. 78A), and its Protocol (ETS No. 154), and the European Code of Social Security (revised) (ETS No. 139).
9. The Assembly invites its members to raise public awareness of the benefits of social inclusion and the need to combat poverty, promoting a more positive attitude towards people in poverty and avoiding their stigmatisation.
10. The Assembly stresses the need to regularly monitor the effectiveness of measures taken, including through topical Parliamentary Assembly debates and the effective use of monitoring mechanisms provided in the Council of Europe conventional instruments, to combat poverty and promote prosperity and social cohesion.
11. In the framework of the biennial Assembly debates on human and social rights, the Assembly decides to return to the question of combating poverty in 2013, monitoring the progress made.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. The Parliamentary Assembly, referring to its Resolution ... (2011) on combating poverty, is convinced that the Council of Europe member states should uphold their commitments to securing the fundamental rights and freedoms of all.
2. The Assembly considers that governments should take further steps towards the ratification of the relevant European treaties, in particular those that can have a direct impact on the situation of people who are experiencing poverty.
3. The Assembly therefore wishes to reiterate the importance of implementing the provisions enshrined in Article 30 of the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) to ensure “the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion”. Member states are called upon “to take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance”.
4. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
 - 4.1. take all necessary measures to promote the ratification and implementation of the European Social Charter (revised) and its protocols and to enable supervision of the implementation of the Charter (revised) under Article C thereof, including through the collective complaints procedure;
 - 4.2. ensure, in particular, that Article 30 of the European Social Charter (revised) becomes part of its core provisions under Article A, paragraph 1b, enabling policy formulation and progress review in combating poverty. All Council of Europe member states should agree to be bound by the provisions of Article 30;
 - 4.3. ask member states to take due account of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies in their public policymaking and relevant budgetary decisions;
 - 4.4. promote signature, ratification and implementation, in addition to the European Social Charter (revised), of the Council of Europe social rights protection instruments, namely:
 - 4.4.1. the European Convention on Social Security (ETS No. 78), the Supplementary Agreement on the Application thereof (ETS No. 78A), and its Protocol (ETS No. 154);
 - 4.4.2. the European Code of Social Security (revised) (ETS No. 139);
 - 4.5. review the current structure of its programme of activities to improve the co-ordination of current measures and to introduce, as necessary, transversal actions aimed at combating poverty and improving access for people experiencing poverty to all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;
 - 4.6. take measures to strengthen the Council of Europe’s capacity to develop evidence-based policy and programmes, including measures to conduct comparative analysis of poverty and social exclusion indicators across member states, in addition to the current Mutual Information System on Social Protection of the Council of Europe (MISSCEO);
 - 4.7. take measures to ensure the availability of and the regular comparison of relevant data, such as minimum wage and in-work (employment) benefits, in those Council of Europe member states which are not member states of the European Union, providing substantive ground for future policymaking;
 - 4.8. take urgent action to implement specific transversal measures aimed particularly at protecting the rights of children, women, people with disabilities, the elderly, and people from minority and migrant communities in situations of poverty;
 - 4.9. design and establish special non-bureaucratic, accessible and effective institutions such as poverty ombudspersons, to which people living in poverty can address their concerns, opinions and demands;
 - 4.10. take due account of the forthcoming biennial debate in the Parliamentary Assembly on the state of human rights and social rights in Europe and provide an update on the measures taken to safeguard the human rights of people experiencing poverty prior to the holding of such debates, for example on the monitoring of the progress made in combating poverty in 2013.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 22 March 2011.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Volontè, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Europe has recently experienced a dramatic increase in poverty: it is estimated that approximately 80 million people are currently affected by poverty in the European Union,⁴ representing 16% of the population.⁵ The World Bank suggests that 60 million people in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union live on less than US\$2 a day.⁶ To have a proper overview of the situation throughout Europe, it would be necessary to gather comparative data for those Council of Europe member states which are not members of the European Union.

2. There is also a rise in absolute,⁷ not just relative, poverty. Lack of income impacts substantially on all aspects of people's lives – access to housing and health care, access to social security and welfare systems, access to education and employment. Poverty thus has many facets, amongst which are solitude and social exclusion.

3. Poverty is not only a matter of income, but also, more fundamentally, a matter of being able to live a life of dignity and enjoy basic human rights and freedoms. It describes a set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing deprivations (for example, of food, housing, education, health care), which impact on people's ability to claim and access their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.⁸

4. The economic crisis has made things more difficult. The social impact of the crisis goes beyond unemployment. It has increased homelessness, over-indebtedness, inequality, and has led to a loss of confidence in the future. As pointed out by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), the high unemployment rate, the related negative psychological impact and the development of tensions may have long-term consequences of "lost generations". This should not, however, discourage us in our drive to improve the lives of millions of people.

5. This report considers poverty from a human rights perspective and proposes solutions that have the potential to change the situation in Europe in the years to come.

2. Overview of the current situation of people living in poverty in Europe

6. The United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1996–2007), the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, launched by the European Union in 2010, followed by the establishment of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: a European framework for social and territorial cohesion⁹, the work of the European Committee of Social Rights, and the first conclusions of the joint Council of Europe-European Union project on "Human rights of people experiencing poverty" (2010–2012) provide substantial ground for reflection on the actions that need to be taken by our member states to achieve the aim of lifting people out of poverty.

4. A household is deemed to be in poverty if its income is less than 60% of median household income for the year in question. The value of this poverty line depends on the number of people in the household, reflecting the fact that larger households need more money (though not proportionally more) than smaller ones to achieve the same standard of living. In the United Kingdom, in 2008–2009, 60% of median income was worth, per week: £119 for a single adult, £161 for a lone parent with one child under 14, and £288 for a couple with two children under 14. (See Anushree Parekh, Tom MacInnes and Peter Kenway, *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2010*)

5. European Union statistics: www.2010againstopoverty.eu/extranet/Eurobarometre_150DPI_091113.pdf.

6. See the report by Assad Alam, October 2005:
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/0,,contentMDK:20627214~pagePK:146736~piPK:146830~theSitePK:258599,00.html>.

7. Having an income below the US\$1/day is defined as the "absolute poverty line".

8. Foreword by Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies", HR/PUB/06/12.

9. See Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion (COM/2010) 758 final,

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0758:FIN:EN:PDF>

and the Council of the European Union conclusions on the Platform (7 March 2011),
www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/119619.pdf).

7. On 15 November 2010, the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee held a hearing with representatives of civil society on the issue of combating poverty¹⁰ with the participation of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, Child Poverty Action Group (United Kingdom), Caritas Europe and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).¹¹ This report takes into account the opinions expressed at the hearing.

8. Many, including members of the Parliamentary Assembly, expressed the view that “it all boils down to poverty”: migration for economic reasons where people in poverty try to find solutions for their families’ survival, the dramatic increase in organ trafficking with most of the victims originating in poverty-stricken areas, children begging in the streets and ending up in paedophilia networks,¹² homeless people freezing to death in the streets, or hospitals refusing patients who do not have health insurance. Poverty is degrading and may push people into the margins of society.

9. The European Union agreed on a strategy to reduce the number of people in situations of poverty by 20% by 2020. The 2009 Eurobarometer survey on poverty and social exclusion¹³ shows that 89% of respondents believe that urgent action is needed by their national governments to fight poverty. According to the EAPN, there has been no real progress in Europe in recent years, which shows that existing policies have been unsuccessful in eliminating poverty and that a different approach is needed. The Social Protection Committee, in its report to the Council of the European Union issued on 18 February 2011, gives an assessment of the social dimension of the Europe 2020 Strategy.¹⁴ The main messages of this report refer to the fact that fulfilling the objective of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union in the next decade requires ambitious national targets and specific measures. This also requires the mobilisation of all stakeholders.¹⁵

10. Moreover, the International Movement ATD Fourth World warns that in order to achieve the aimed reduction of 20%, people in extreme poverty may simply be excluded from the statistical data collection, which would lead to a *de facto* abandonment. For governments it is simpler to focus on people who are the easiest to lift out of poverty. It is much more difficult to help those who are completely excluded. I therefore urge policy makers to make sure that these people are not left behind.

2.1. Children in poverty

11. The situation is particularly difficult for children who experience poverty. It is estimated that 19 million children are affected by poverty in the European Union. As stressed by Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, combating child poverty is a question of political priority. Children who grow up in poverty are much more vulnerable than others. They are more likely to be in poor health, to underachieve at school, to get into trouble with the police, to fail to develop vocational skills, and thus to be unemployed or badly paid and to be dependent on social welfare in later life. Childhood poverty is the first step towards deeper gaps and inequalities in society and tends to be passed from generation to generation in a vicious circle.¹⁶

12. Families are often torn apart by extreme poverty. As pointed out by the International Movement ATD Fourth World¹⁷ at the hearing on 15 November 2010, children are often taken into care when parents do not have enough money to provide support. Unfortunately, resources are not always mobilised to enable children to return to their families.

13. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that in the 30 countries reviewed,¹⁸ around 12% of all children were at risk of poverty in the mid 2000s. There is wide variation across countries. Child poverty rates were below 5% in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, but they exceeded

10. http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/NewsManager/EMB_NewsManagerView.asp?ID=6077.

11. The minutes of the hearing have been declassified and are available from the secretariat of the committee.

12. Idesbald Nicaise and Françoise de Boe, “Combating poverty as a human rights issue in Belgium”, Comments to the Report of Dr Arjun Sengupta (E/CN.4/2006/43) based on the experience of the Belgian Resource Centre for the Fight against Poverty, p. 1.

13. Eurobarometer brochure: www.2010againstopoverty.eu/extranet/Eurobarometre_150DPI_091113.pdf and Report on Poverty and Social Exclusion: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_321_en.pdf.

14. www.lex.unict.it/eurolabor/documentazione/altridoc/ricerche_rapporti/SPC_Europe2020_social_dim_Feb11.pdf.

15. <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st06/st06624.en11.pdf>.

16. http://commissioner.cws.coe.int/tiki-view_blog_post.php?postId=110.

17. Represented by Ms Marie-Cécile Renoux.

18. www.oecd.org/dataoecd/52/43/41929552.pdf.

20% in Poland, Turkey, Mexico and the United States. In general, poverty rates for children were above those for the entire population, except for Austria, Australia, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Korea and Japan (see Appendix 1).

14. While several factors contribute to child poverty, two important factors relate to whether children live with a sole parent and whether or not the parent is in paid work. Children living with a sole parent have a higher probability of being in poverty than those living with two adults. However, the probability of being poor is strongly associated with the employment status of parents. OECD countries with a larger share of mothers in paid work also record lower poverty rates among children.¹⁹

15. As reported by the Child Poverty Action Group, statistics in the United Kingdom show that child poverty doubled between 1979 and 1997, rising from 2 million in 1979 to 4.4 million children in 1997. Research shows that poverty robs children of their life chances. Following massive civil society mobilisation, the United Kingdom Government adopted the Child Poverty Act,²⁰ a binding law that commits all successive United Kingdom governments to ending child poverty by 2020. The Child Poverty Act focuses on six elements: the duty to end child poverty, the duty to establish and make public a strategy including “building blocks”, an Independent Child Poverty Commission, an annual report, work with local partners, and contains a clause about the economic and fiscal circumstances.

16. UNICEF stresses the need to take action to improve children’s well-being,²¹ in particular through poverty alleviation measures. International civil society organisations, such as Eurochild, launched, as part of the European Year to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010, a call to end child poverty as a matter of urgency. The measures proposed by Eurochild include: empowering children, provision of universal access to quality services, equal opportunities for all, prevention and early intervention, supporting vulnerable children, strengthening families, increasing accountability, provision of sufficient resources allocation and the introduction of multidimensional policies to combat poverty.

2.2. Other people at risk of poverty

17. In times of economic crisis, care should also be taken to meet the needs of and to offer special protection to other people who are at risk of poverty: women,²² in particular mothers bringing up their children alone, the elderly, people with disabilities, and people from minority and migrant communities.

18. Member states should take specific transversal measures aimed at protecting those who are particularly vulnerable. Specific measures designed to improve, for instance, access to employment for people with disabilities²³ will lead to an improvement in the lives of thousands who would not have otherwise benefited from adequate employment opportunities.

19. Ibid. See also the OECD family database, Report on Child Poverty, Chart CO2.2.C Poverty rates by household type, mid-2000s: www.oecd.org/document/4/0,3746,en_2649_34819_37836996_1_1_1_1,00.html

20. The targets set by Tony Blair in 1999 aimed to end child poverty forever within twenty years. Tony Blair aimed at decreasing it by 50% by 2011. Substantial progress was made in the period 1999 to 2005, after which progress stalled. The aim was to lift 600 000 people out of poverty. The current child poverty rate is 30%, that is 3.9 million children (after deduction of housing costs).

21. See UNICEF “Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries”, Innocenti Report Card 7, 2007; and UNICEF “The children left behind: A league table of inequality in child well-being in the world’s rich countries”, UNICEF (2010), Innocenti Report Card 9, 2010, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.

22. The Assembly was invited to consider in depth the recent trends in feminisation of poverty (See [Doc. 11276](#), report on the feminisation of poverty of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Ms Hermine Naghdalyan (Armenia, ALDE). As mentioned by Ms Gaby Vermot-Mangold (Switzerland, SOC) in the Assembly debate on 26 June 2007, “young single-parent mothers and elderly women are the main victims of the feminisation of poverty”, this being equivalent “to a human rights violation”. In its [Resolution 1558 \(2007\)](#) and [Recommendation 1800 \(2007\)](#) on the feminisation of poverty, the Assembly called on member states to protect women as being particularly vulnerable to falling into poverty.

23. See Action Line 4 on Employment of the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2006)5 to member states on the Council of Europe action plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015).

3. Combating poverty: solutions from a human rights perspective

3.1. Human rights of people in poverty

19. Poverty is often regarded as a social issue. Social support measures must be put in place to lift people out of poverty, but such measures are not sufficient on their own. Human rights-based strategies, putting the individual at the centre of policymaking rather than focusing on economic aspects alone, are what is needed today.

20. Respect for human rights should be the basis of all efforts to eradicate poverty. This would necessitate a comprehensive review of existing systems of policy development.

21. We must ensure that social rights of all people, including those who are poor, are protected. A poor person is no different, as a human being, from someone who is not poor. Approaching poverty in terms of human rights enables poor people to be recognised, and to recognise themselves, as people even when their dignity is being profoundly undermined.²⁴

22. The decision to view social rights as an integral part of human rights – and to protect them accordingly – requires a commitment on the part of policy makers. Substantial changes are necessary in the way policies are designed, laws are drafted, and budgetary decisions are taken.

23. Universality of human rights requires that human rights be guaranteed for all, without discrimination.²⁵ The principle of universality of human rights, which is an established international norm, is, however, yet to become a reality for a great number of people in Europe. Poverty is a *de facto* barrier to exercising one's human rights.

24. The indivisibility and interdependence of human rights is also an established international norm. The loss of one right can, and does, lead to the loss of other rights. For example, the loss of employment could subsequently lead to the loss of access to health care. This is very often the case as regards people in situations of poverty. Conversely, access to one human right offers access to others.

25. Recognition of the principles of non-discrimination and equality “helps to highlight the fact that a great deal of poverty originates from discriminatory practices – both overt and covert. This recognition calls for the reorientation of poverty reduction strategies from a tendency to focus on narrow economic issues towards a broader strategy that also addresses the socio-cultural and political-legal institutions which sustain the structures of discrimination”.²⁶

26. According to Article 30 of the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163), member states have to ensure “the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion”. Member states are called upon “to take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance”. As stressed by the European Committee of Social Rights, living in a situation of poverty and social exclusion violates the dignity of human beings.²⁷ Monitoring mechanisms should be in place, involving all relevant actors, including civil society and persons affected by poverty and exclusion.²⁸

27. I welcome, in this respect, this Assembly's decision to monitor the progress of social rights in Europe in a biennial debate on the state of human rights in Europe, as referred to in [Resolution 1792 \(2011\)](#) on the monitoring of commitments concerning social rights.

24. Combating poverty as a human rights issue in Belgium, op. cit. p. 7.

25. The mere fact that a person is poor should not prevent that person from exercising his or her rights. Ms Diane Roman, Professor of public law (France) in her thesis on public law and poverty (*Le droit public face à la pauvreté*) considers that the evolution of the contemporary theory of fundamental rights allows a legal finding that defines poverty as a material situation resulting in a violation of human rights. In this sense, poverty often leads to a violation of fundamental rights, resulting from a malfunctioning of public administration systems. According to her, the legal concept of poverty incorporates the fundamental human rights. “Poverty is considered to be a socially unacceptable disorder in the enjoyment of qualified fundamental rights by the French legislature in 1998: employment, housing, health, justice, education, training and culture protection”, a formulation that she stressed was identical to the preamble of the Constitution of the IVe Republic (27 October 1946).

26. UNHCHR Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies, p. 5: www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/docs/poverty_strategies.doc.

27. Statement of Interpretation on Article 30, see in particular Conclusions 2003, France, p. 214.

28. Ibid.

28. In 2001, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Mary Robinson, called upon the international community to strengthen efforts to eradicate poverty, taking human rights as a basis.²⁹ Ms Louise Arbour took over in 2006 and stressed the importance of considering poverty reduction strategies from a human rights perspective, launching the Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies. The Principles and Guidelines call for the integration into poverty reduction strategies of specific measures to secure the right to work, the right to adequate food, the right to adequate housing, the right to health, the right to education, the right to personal security and privacy, the right to equal access to justice, and access to political rights and freedoms.³⁰

29. Today, the United Nations is advancing towards greater protection of the rights of people experiencing poverty,³¹ even though the financial crisis has hit hard and will prevent countries from attaining the first of the Millennium Development Goals – the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger – by 2015.³²

3.2. Measures to enhance effective access to all human rights

30. The effectiveness of human rights starts with effective access to these rights, based on the principle of non-discrimination and equal opportunities. The human rights approach to poverty reduction requires that laws and institutions which may foster discrimination against specific individuals and groups be eliminated and that more resources be devoted to the areas of activity with the greatest potential to benefit the poor.³³

3.2.1. Civil and political rights

31. Member states should take measures aimed at strengthening participation and empowerment³⁴ of people in situations of poverty and social exclusion. Effective poverty reduction is not possible without the empowerment of the poor. This has also been emphasised by the Council of Europe Guidelines on improving the situation of low-income workers and on the empowerment of people experiencing extreme poverty, adopted in May 2010.

32. People living in poverty usually suffer from various forms of insecurity, ranging from economic insecurity to physical violence.

33. Policies aimed at eliminating, or at least, substantially reducing, violence against the poor should clearly distinguish between violence by state and non-state actors. Violence may take the form of death threats, violent attacks, harassment, intimidation or severe discriminatory treatment.³⁵ Accordingly, efforts to strengthen the right of the poor to personal security should have a crucial place in poverty reduction strategies.

29. "Lawyers should not be the only voice in human rights, and equally, economists should not be the only voice in development. The challenge now is to demonstrate how the assets represented by human rights principles, a form of international public goods, can be of value in pursuing the overarching development objective, the eradication of poverty" ("Bridging the Gap between Human Rights and Development", Presidential Lecture, World Bank, December 2001, <http://www.unhcr.ch/Hurricane/Hurricane.nsf/60a520ce334aaa77802566100031b4bf/2da59cd3ffc033dcc1256b1a0033f7c3?OpenDocument>).

30. www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/docs/poverty_strategies.doc.

31. See Excerpts of the report of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on its 58th session – Geneva, 7-25 August 2006, rapporteur Mr Mohammed Habib Cherif, follow-up to Resolution 2006/9 on the implementation of existing human rights norms and standards in the context of the fight against extreme poverty.

www.atd-fourthworld.org/IMG/doc/A-HRC-2-2-RES-2006-9-en-with-res.doc).

32. See the Millennium Development Goals Report 2010, United Nations:

www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202010%20En%20r15%20-low%20res%2020100615%20-.pdf.

33. See footnote 26.

34. Views supported also by Caritas and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) at the hearing on 15 November 2010. The term "empowerment" is used to describe a process of increasing capabilities of poor individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes, and to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives, see "Empowerment and Poverty reduction: a Sourcebook", 2002, World Bank, Washington DC, and the World Bank PovertyNet website:

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,menuPK:336998~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:336992,00.htmlhttp://newsletters.worldbank.org/newsletters/listnl.htm?nl=494545>.

35. UNHCHR Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies, op. cit. p. 41-42.

34. Specific measures should be put in place to improve access to justice for people in poverty: introducing information campaigns on the right of access to justice in areas where poor people live, increasing the number of judges and law-enforcement officials in poverty-stricken areas, establishing law clinics for people living in poverty, improving access to courts for the poor, in particular in remote rural areas, and helping poor people who are victims of crime to bring offenders to justice.³⁶

35. Lack of political rights and freedoms is another dimension of poverty. Involvement of people in situations of poverty in the decision-making process is, therefore, essential. It reinforces the basic human rights principle of participatory decision making. The best way to prevent poverty and the best way to fight against it is, therefore, participation. The issues of poverty and social exclusion in Europe should therefore be addressed through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, which aims at providing the skills and competencies necessary for such democratic participation.³⁷

36. People living in poverty should be encouraged and enabled to express, freely and publicly, their opinions, ideas, political claims and criticisms of governmental policies, both within the poverty reduction strategy process and beyond, without any arbitrary restrictions or limitations.³⁸ I found very useful indeed the UNHCHR recommendation that governments design and establish special non-bureaucratic, accessible and effective institutions such as poverty ombudsmen, to which people living in poverty can address their concerns, opinions and demands.

3.2.2. Social, economic, and cultural rights

37. Many countries put in place income support regulations to prevent economic hardship. People experiencing poverty, however, do not always get access to such support. Several reasons can be cited: they lack information and are not aware of the possibility; they are ashamed to apply for benefits; their lives are too chaotic (for example, through addiction); or they fear too much supervision of their private affairs. Therefore, it is crucial that attention is paid to the dissemination of information and that barriers to getting access to these services are overcome.³⁹ Appropriate awareness raising is necessary amongst people in poverty of the measures in place to assist them.

38. Effective exercise of the right to social security can be further strengthened by the ratification and implementation by Council of Europe member states of the European Convention on Social Security (ETS No. 78),⁴⁰ the Supplementary Agreement (ETS No. 78A)⁴¹ on the application thereof, and its Protocol (ETS No. 154).⁴²

39. It is regrettable that one of the most important Council of Europe conventional instruments that determine access to benefits, the European Convention on Social Security, remains unratified by a great number of countries. This Convention applies to all legislation concerning the following branches of social security: sickness and maternity benefits; invalidity benefits; old age benefits; survivors' benefits; benefits in respect of occupational injuries and diseases; death grants; unemployment benefits; and family benefits. If all member states met these obligations, there would be fewer people in situations of poverty today.

40. The argument that access and entitlement to various benefits are matters that depend on the economic situation of a country has been used in the past to prevent such access. I am absolutely convinced, however, that budgetary decisions should not make access to human rights conditional. It should be the reverse – we need to be firm about the fact that rights, once they are acquired and fixed through commitments made at international level, should not become reversible or made conditional. The importance of the ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe social rights protection instruments should not, therefore, be underestimated if we are serious about combating poverty.

36. Ibid, p. 45.

37. Tackling poverty and social exclusion in Europe through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education in Adult Learning, Conference proceedings, Glasgow, 4-5 March 2010, Textbook for EDC/HRE practitioners, DARE (Democracy and Human Rights Education in Europe).

38. Ibid, p. 49.

39. *Strengthening social cohesion: Improving the situation of low-income workers, Empowerment of people experiencing extreme poverty*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, 2010, p. 69.

40. <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ListeTraites.asp?CM=8&CL=ENG> .

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

41. In addition to Article 30 of the European Social Charter (revised), implementation of the requirements stipulated in other articles, including Article 4 on the right to a fair remuneration,⁴³ Article 12 on the right to social security and Article 13 on the right to social and medical assistance, Article 24 on the right to protection in cases of termination of employment and Article 25 on the right of workers to the protection of their claims in the event of the insolvency of their employer, are essential in securing people's futures and in combating poverty. The ratification and the implementation of the European Social Charter (revised) in its entirety would therefore constitute an important step towards securing people's rights, prosperity and strengthening social cohesion.

42. As referred to earlier in this report, decent housing for people in situations of poverty is essential. Article 31 of the European Social Charter (revised) clearly affirms that states parties should "undertake to take measures designed: 1) to promote access to housing of an adequate standard; 2) to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination; and 3) to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources".

43. In its interpretation of Article 31 on the right to housing, the European Committee of Social Rights asserts that "the implementation of the Charter requires states parties not merely to take legal action but also to make available the resources and introduce the operational procedures necessary to give full effect to the rights specified therein".⁴⁴

44. People in situations of poverty should also have access to adequate medical assistance, as stipulated in Article 13 of the European Social Charter (revised), which calls for social and health care that would allow "any person, who is without adequate resources and who is unable to secure such resources either by his own efforts or from other sources, in particular by benefits under a social security scheme" to be "granted adequate assistance, and in case of sickness, the care necessitated by his condition".

45. Access to education, vocational guidance and training is important in so far as it gives people a secure basis to build skills and competencies which would enable them to enter gainful employment. All poverty reduction strategies should lay emphasis on the realisation of the right to education and ensure that people living in poverty are the first to benefit from better access to education. Finally, access to employment and other types of occupational integration (including self-employment through entrepreneurship) should be further improved.

46. Social security has a major role to play in the reduction of poverty. The most recent data shows that in 2009 social transfers, including pensions, decreased the overall risk of poverty in the European Union by 26 percentage points – from 42.3% to 16.3% (Eurostat, 2010).

47. The European Code of Social Security (ETS No. 48) is the basic standard-setting instrument of the Council of Europe in the field of social security. It provides for minimum standards for nine principal social security branches based on the right to social security enshrined in Article 12 of the European Social Charter (revised) and also embodies a monitoring mechanism based on national reports. The Code guarantees compliance with measurable social security standards through a procedure of annual supervision, based on national reports and resolutions of the Committee of Ministers for each contracting party. No similar standard setting-instrument exists at the European Union level. The Code has been ratified by 21 member states.

48. I am absolutely convinced, therefore, that member states should take measures to implement the relevant Council of Europe soft law and conventional instruments to promote effective access to human rights for people in situations of poverty. As far as the resolutions and recommendations are concerned, I would like to draw delegates' attention to the following:

- Assembly [Resolution 1558 \(2007\)](#) and [Recommendation 1800 \(2007\)](#) on the feminisation of poverty;
- Assembly [Resolution 1717 \(2010\)](#) on the social impact of the economic crisis;
- Guidelines on improving the situation of low-income workers and on the empowerment of people experiencing poverty adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 5 May 2010 at the 1084th meeting of Ministers' Deputies;
- Recommendation CONF/PLE(2009)REC8 on combating poverty, adopted by the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) of the Council of Europe on 1 October 2009.

43. According to Article 4, paragraph 1, the parties undertake "to recognise the right of workers to remuneration such as will give them and their families a decent standard of living".

44. International Movement ATD Fourth World v. France, complaint No. 33/2006, decision on the merits of 5 December 2007, paragraphs 58-71.

49. I would also like to recall this Assembly's decisions in its [Resolution 1717 \(2010\)](#) on the social impact of the economic crisis. Sustainable social and health protection systems to assist the vulnerable can prevent increased poverty and address social hardship, while also helping to stabilise the economy and maintain and promote employment. The Assembly called, *inter alia*, for the introduction of cash transfer schemes for the poor to meet their immediate needs and to alleviate poverty (paragraph 11.1), for the building of adequate social protection for all (paragraph 11.2), for the extension of the duration and coverage of unemployment benefits (paragraph 11.3), and for ensuring that the long-term unemployed stay connected to the labour market through, for example, skills development for employability (paragraph 11.4).

50. I would also suggest strengthening the Council of Europe capacity for comparative analysis of poverty-related indicators, since this provides essential information for policymaking to combat poverty. This is the case of the comparative data provided by the Mutual Information System on Social Protection of the Council of Europe (MISSCEO).

51. MISSCEO promotes the regular exchange of information on social protection in those member states of the Council of Europe which are not members of the European Union and in the three non-European states.⁴⁵ MISSCEO regularly produces comparative tables on social protection systems across MISSCEO countries, summarising social protection legislation, and complementing the comparative tables of MISSOC, the Mutual Information System on Social Protection in the member states of the European Union, the European Economic Area (EEA) and in Switzerland.

52. MISSCEO provides a detailed review of legislation in a range of specific social protection fields. The accumulations of various social protection measures are regularly reviewed. The comparative data on the accumulations between old-age pensions and earnings from work show a great variety of approaches across member states, ranging from suspension of old-age pensions upon receipt of earnings from work (Albania, Croatia, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"), to acceptance of full accumulation (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Russian Federation, Ukraine). In Serbia, there is no limitation unless the pension recipient is working abroad: the old-age pension is suspended during this period. In Turkey, a change in legislation in 2008 brought about a system by which various pension schemes apply. For workers first insured after 1 October 2008 the pension is suspended if these pensioners go back to work, which is not always the case for those insured prior to 2008, some of which can get up to 30% of pensions paid upon written request to social services.

53. It is essential to know what approaches are best suited to combating poverty. Such conclusions should be evidence based. At the same time, I should reiterate that the protection of human rights should be the basis for all decisions with regard to the development of social protection systems.

4. Redistribution of wealth – A challenge of the 21st century

54. The OECD draws attention to the fact that economic growth has not been fairly distributed, and that the current economic crisis further widens the gap between rich and poor.

55. Member states should take all necessary measures to promote an increase in income per person and fight deprivation. The question of redistribution of wealth therefore needs to be addressed. Some countries have studied the possibility of introducing limits for both the lowest and the highest levels of wage.⁴⁶

56. Recent debates in the framework of the G20 have also drawn attention to the need to consider this issue. The G20 "global" inequality measures demonstrate that large gains have been made in reducing income disparities across people in the G20 group of countries, within each country, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁷

45. MISSCEO started its work in 1999 and now includes the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Serbia, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Turkey and Ukraine, as well as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. It covers the following specific branches of social protection legislation: health care, sickness-cash benefits, maternity, invalidity, old age, survivors, employment injuries and occupational diseases, family benefits, unemployment, and guaranteeing sufficient resources to protect against the risk of poverty (www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialsecurity/MISSCEO/missceo_en.asp).

46. This was done in Slovenia through the establishment of a minimum and a maximum wage.

47. The decline in income disparities among the G20 member countries has taken place during a period, where several important and populous developing countries in the G20 have implemented economic and financial liberalisation measures, welcomed trade and foreign investment, and have integrated further into the global economy. This being said, the number of poor people is still large. See Xavier Sala-i-Martin and Sanket Mohapatra, "Poverty, inequality and the distribution of income in the Group of 20", 2002.

57. More needs to be done, however, to lift people out of poverty. Recent commitments to poverty reduction triggered a series of specific proposals, notably by France. Two ideas were mentioned: the introduction of an international tax on trade so that the generated amount could be channelled to the least developed countries, and taxation on trade in capital, with the similar aim of redistributing earnings. I am absolutely convinced that this issue needs further consideration. These solutions should not remain merely theoretical but should be put into practice by countries and international organisations.

58. Bridging the gap between the poorest and the richest is even more important today. It is unthinkable that some individuals may earn a million times more than others. Extremes in income are dangerous, as these disparities cause tensions and threaten social cohesion.

4.1. Minimum wage and minimum income: current trends

59. The Council of Europe calls upon member states to secure fair wages. Article 4 of the European Social Charter (revised) on the right to a fair remuneration stipulates that “the Contracting Parties undertake ... to recognise the right of workers to remuneration such as will give them and their families a decent standard of living”.

60. In January 2011, 20 out of the European Union’s 27 member states⁴⁸ and two candidate countries⁴⁹ had national legislation setting a minimum wage by statute or by national intersectoral agreement. Monthly minimum wages varied widely, from €123 in Bulgaria to €1 758 in Luxembourg. When adjusted for differences in purchasing power, the disparities between member states are reduced from a range of one to 14 (in euros) to a range of one to six in purchasing power standard (PPS). At the opposite ends of the scale were again Luxembourg (1 452 PPS per month) and Bulgaria (233 PPS) (see Appendix 2).

61. The Council of Europe does not have a mechanism for regular monitoring of minimum wages across all member states similar to that of the European Union, and uses mostly OECD data. I believe that availability and regular comparison of relevant data, such as minimum wage and in-work benefits, in all Council of Europe member states would provide substantive ground for future policy making to combat poverty.

62. According to the OECD,⁵⁰ since earnings from work are the most immediate determinant of in-work incomes, minimum wages are often seen as an important policy tool to fight in-work poverty. The critical issue is to set the minimum wage to an appropriate level. Indeed, minimum wages may constitute a valuable instrument to address in-work poverty problems among households in which all working-age adults are employed full time in a low-paid job.

63. But minimum wages are not designed to address specific family situations or specific employment conditions, such as part-time work.

64. The OECD stresses that to combat poverty minimum wages, although they are necessary, do not suffice, since they provide little support to the large majority of the working poor who cannot find a full-time job. Minimum wages are also not sufficient to protect those who are most at risk of poverty, such as lone parents.

65. According to the OECD, setting a very high wage floor would not help, since it could damage the employment prospects of the most vulnerable workers. High minimum wages tend to reduce employment among low-productivity groups. A number of countries have thus reduced employers’ social security contributions at the minimum-wage level in order to mitigate these potential adverse effects.

66. However, if the minimum wage is set at a reasonable level, there could be significant synergies between the in-work benefits and the minimum wage.

67. More than half of the OECD countries now offer in-work benefits,⁵¹ that is, transfer payments that top up the earning of low-income workers. These schemes have a major advantage over more traditional social transfers: they not only redistribute resources to low-income families, but also make employment more attractive for workers with low earning potential, since in-work benefit payment is conditional on having a job. They strengthen the financial incentives to work.

48. Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom (Eurostat, February 2011).

49. Croatia and Turkey (Eurostat, February 2011).

50. See Chapter 3 of the *OECD Employment Outlook 2009* and the Policy Brief “In-Work Poverty: What can Governments do?”.

68. Setting a wage floor prevents employers from “pocketing” the value of in-work benefits by lowering wages. Thus, combined with in-work benefits schemes, minimum wages help to redistribute resources to low-wage workers, thereby increasing the effectiveness of such schemes. The congruence of policy objectives means that minimum wages can, to some extent, be traded directly against reduced in-work benefits payments. As a result, overall expenditure on in-work benefits can be lower, as can the taxes needed to finance them.

69. With minimum wages in place, the burden of supporting low-wage workers then falls to a larger extent on employers (since they are the ones who set the wages), as well as on their customers and employees, and to a lesser extent on taxpayers financing government transfers. Indeed, it should be the employers’ responsibility to provide adequate pay for the job, and not the taxpayer’s responsibility.

70. Minimum income is different from the minimum wage. The term is usually used to describe the payment made by the state that provides a “safety net” for people who cannot work or access a decent job. The vast majority of the European Union member states provide minimum income schemes,⁵² which are non-contributory, means-tested social assistance schemes. Article 34 paragraph 3 of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights, which came into force on 1 December 2009, states that “in order to combat social exclusion and poverty the Union recognises and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources”.

71. Minimum income schemes are one of the cornerstones of the welfare state. They ensure the social inclusion of people for whom employment is not an option or who do not have the capacity to work, whether because of a severe disability, long-term sickness or mental health problems, age, family commitments, etc. The anti-poverty movement calls for adequate minimum income to ensure a dignified standard of living for all.⁵³

72. The Council of the European Union, in the conclusions of the Council meeting on 7 June 2010⁵⁴ in Luxembourg, calls for sustainable social security systems, adequate pensions and social inclusion objectives. The Council took into account the “role that minimum pensions, or minimum income provisions for older people, play as a tool for social inclusion and poverty alleviation”. When addressing the issue of sustainability of pension systems, the Council underlined the need to focus on:

- measurement and monitoring of adequacy;
- design of minimum income provisions for older people while avoiding undermining work incentives prior to retirement;
- conditions for qualifying for an adequate pension (contribution record criteria, career breaks, pensionable age, etc.);
- indexation and adjustment of minimum pensions or minimum income provisions for older people;
- positive evolution of the participation of older workers in the labour market.

73. There are also proposals to introduce an unconditional universal income,⁵⁵ sometimes called “basic income”, covering some absolute necessities, such as food costs, that would be given to all. It was suggested to build a universal income as a Euro-dividend, securing a living minimum for all European Union citizens and involving the European Union in the process of income distribution.

74. I believe there is a need for more cooperation to review what works and what does not work in order to prevent people from falling into poverty and to help those who are in poverty recover.

51. There are two broad categories of in-work benefits: those targeted at individual low-paid workers, providing stronger work incentives, and those targeted at low-income families, which are more focused on redistribution. Policy Brief “In-Work Poverty: What can Governments do?”.

52. See “Minimum Income Schemes Across European Union Member States”, Synthesis report by Hugh Frazer and Eric Marlier (Social Inclusion Policy and Practice, CEPS/INSTEAD, October 2009). Overview based on the national reports prepared by the European Union Network of National Independent Experts on Social Inclusion (www.ceps.lu/pdf/11/art1464.pdf).

53. Adequacy of minimum income in the European Union, EAPN, 2010, p. 9.

54. www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/114960.pdf.

55. “Allocation universelle, justice sociale et pauvreté”, Yannick Vanderborght, Professor of political science, University of Saint-Louis (Brussels) and the Catholic University of Leuven.

4.2. Case study: a new social card to fight absolute poverty in Italy

75. I would like to bring to your attention the proposal put forward by the Italian Association of Christian Workers for a new social card to fight absolute poverty.

76. The assessment report of the Work Family Fund made by the Diocese of Milan following the suggestion of the Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, emphasises the need to promote stronger public policies towards poverty, complementary to the efforts made by dioceses, non-profit organisations, enterprises and private citizens. Such policies should be addressed to families who live in absolute poverty. Unfortunately, similar measures do not currently exist in Italy, which together with Greece, is the only country in Europe that doesn't have a similar policy.

77. Families experiencing absolute poverty are unable to reach suitable nutritional levels, do not live in a house with hot water and energy and cannot afford proper clothes. According to ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), in 2009, 4.7% of Italian families lived in conditions of absolute poverty.

78. In December 2008, the Berlusconi government introduced a "purchase card", known as the Social Card, for families with adults over 65 and children under 3 years old, living in poverty.

79. Although limited, this has been the first national measure against poverty to be introduced in Italy. The Christian Association of Italian Workers (ACLI) is now proposing a poverty plan in order to address the weak points of the social card and emphasise its strengths. This project aims to introduce, in the next three years, a national measure for all families living in absolute poverty: the New Social Card.

80. What are the main aspects of New Social Card? First of all, it is addressed to all families living in conditions of absolute poverty in Italy, including European Community visa holders. The amount of funds made available will be raised from €40 to €129 per month. This will ensure an 18% increase in the average income of poor families. The card also provides services, such as social, educational, training or employment services. This plan aims to empower local welfare by giving city administrations the responsibility of organising services at a local scale. This new project is also focused on the key role played by the third sector as service supplier, local programme planner and as an antenna able to identify the needs that are present in a specific area.

81. The proposal put forward by ACLI may not be particularly innovative but it is the result of a series of analyses and suggestions made by experts over the last few years. In the next three years the proposed new measures will cost €787 million more than the previous measures in place, and will amount to a total of €2 360 million of public expense. This is a matter of political priorities. There are €487 million left from the present Social Card fund, as it has been recently announced by the Minister of Relations with Parliament, Mr Elio Vito. If the project were to be developed now, the cost of the plan for the first year would amount to €300 million. This of course would only happen if the government wanted to introduce a structural intervention to impact poverty starting from now.

5. The role of the main actors and questions that need to be addressed

5.1. Responsibilities of the state

82. States are responsible for guaranteeing the full enjoyment of all human rights. Achievements in the field of human rights should be irreversible and must not depend on the current economic situation, as governments may very well be tempted to use the economic argument to restrict access to human rights. The use of economic arguments as an excuse for maintaining barriers to the exercise of human rights should not be tolerated.

83. This is what Europe is about: we cannot make our values of human rights dependent on past economic decision-making errors, such as the recently witnessed crisis due to financial speculations, or the plain mismanagement of budgets.

84. Social rights are part of human rights and represent one of the greatest achievements of European societies in the 20th century, and we cannot and should not let these achievements be scaled down and reduced to conditionality for economic reasons.

85. The OECD underlines the effectiveness of social and labour market policies in tackling poverty and excessive inequalities. Promoting employment is a key measure of public policies aimed at combating poverty. Recent developments, however, show that employment does not always protect against poverty.

86. Member states should improve the situation of low-income workers.⁵⁶ For 8% of European Union citizens, having a job is not enough to work one's way out of poverty. Member states should reform welfare regimes to ensure that poverty traps are removed and that low-income workers are not excluded from social welfare benefits.⁵⁷ A minimum income that would prevent falling into poverty must be secured. A decent income is key to developing one's capacity to meet the ever rising living costs.

87. Building individual capacity requires more than sufficient material and monetary means, however. There are four cumulative levels of building individual capacity for people living in extreme poverty,⁵⁸ the first one being the provision of basic material support, moving next to the provision of allowances, to access to services, and, finally, access to employment or self-employment.

88. Member states must ensure that strategies and actions meet the needs of people experiencing poverty, prevent people from falling into poverty by providing support in critical situations (for example in case of work-related injuries or other accidents, or by helping to provide refuge from a violent environment), and assist those who are in poverty to recover.

89. The basic principle of accountability⁵⁹ in a democratic society calls for a regular review and adjustment of public policies to meet the needs of all citizens. This should also apply to the protection of human rights of people in situations of poverty. Regular monitoring of the progress in poverty eradication and social inclusion is essential.

90. Member states of the European Union already initiated such monitoring procedures during the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1996-2007), and as a follow-up to the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion launched by the European Union in 2010. The United Kingdom reports,⁶⁰ for instance, an increase in the unemployment of young people between 16 and 24 years old to 20% by mid-2010, the highest in the last eighteen years. This has a dramatic influence on young people's lives, pushing thousands below the poverty line.

91. Monitoring of poverty, as it is done now, does not always reflect all the facets of the lives of people experiencing poverty. The European Union uses the income-based index to estimate the number of poor people. Civil society organisations suggest moving further towards analysing poverty in all its complexity, starting with factors that determine it.

92. Caritas Europe has analysed the multi-dimensionality of poverty. A lack of financial resources is just one aspect of poverty. Many other dimensions determine the state of poverty that is experienced by an individual, including the job market, family situation, social protection, and also some immaterial aspects, such as solidarity. A working tool, which refers to these dimensions, was designed by Caritas Switzerland.⁶¹ They described eight axes for action, giving the possibility to diagnose a situation of poverty and social exclusion. In addition to financial resources, these were: health-related well-being, accommodation, level of education, occupational integration, societal integration, integration regarding laws of residence, and the family of origin

56. See "Guidelines on improving the situation of low-income workers and on the empowerment of people experiencing extreme poverty", adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 5 May 2010 at the 1084th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies. "Low-income workers" are defined as "those living in households whose income from employment, together with other sources of income, is not sufficient to ensure that their total income is above 60% of the median national equivalised income (that is, the 'at risk of poverty' threshold)". (Equivalised income is derived by calculating an equivalence factor according to the chosen equivalence scale, and then dividing income by the factor. The equivalence factor derived using the "modified OECD" equivalence scale is built up by allocating points to each person in a household. Taking the first adult in the household as having a weight of 1 point, each additional person who is 15 years of age or older is allocated 0.5 points, and each child under the age of 15 is allocated 0.3 points. Equivalised household income is derived by dividing total household income by a factor equal to the sum of the equivalence points allocated to the household members. Equivalised household income is an indicator of the economic resources available to each member of a household. It can therefore be used for comparing the situation of individuals as well as comparing the situation of households.)

57. "Guidelines on improving the situation of low-income workers and on the empowerment of people experiencing extreme poverty", item II.2.

58. *Strengthening social cohesion: Improving the situation of low-income workers, Empowerment of people experiencing extreme poverty*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, 2010, p. 66.

59. See also Guideline 6 on Monitoring and Accountability of the UNHCHR Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies.

60. Anushree Parekh, Tom MacInnes and Peter Kenway, *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2010*. This is the 13th annual report in the Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion series.

61. The online tool is available in German at: www.caritas-zuerich.ch/f53000342.html.

(for example a family of immigrants or displaced persons lacking access to employment may find difficulties securing a decent living).⁶² Level one in all dimensions showed that the person described was more likely to be marginalised. This also indicated exactly what action and what kind of support were needed.

93. The World Bank also initiated a review of poverty monitoring and recently held a workshop on the measuring of the multidimensional aspects of poverty and well-being.⁶³ In this respect, I am looking forward to the conclusions of the joint Council of Europe-European Union project on “Human rights of people experiencing poverty” (2010-2012) will enable policy makers to better grasp the effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies. I would therefore strongly recommend that all Council of Europe member states improve their monitoring of poverty and social exclusion. The monitoring of the access to social rights which is already in place, based on the European Social Charter (revised), should be pursued.

5.2. Responsibilities of other actors

94. Another feature of the human rights approach is that poverty reduction becomes a shared responsibility. Whilst the state is primarily responsible for realising the human rights of people living within its jurisdiction, other actors, including non-state actors, also have a responsibility to contribute to, or at the very least not to violate, human rights.⁶⁴ In 1914, J. H. Hollander was already warning of the responsibilities of industry in securing a decent existence, free from poverty.⁶⁵

95. The financial sector has a major role to play in the prevention of over-indebtedness of households. Social responsibilities must therefore be shared, involving the financial sector as a stakeholder responsible for the progress in securing human rights, including social rights, for all.

96. People experiencing poverty need access to financial means that will enable their recovery. Access to financial support, including through entrepreneurship based on the provision of micro-credits, is absolutely crucial. The creation of social enterprises⁶⁶ is another means of reaching the aims of eradicating poverty and strengthening social inclusion. Appropriate follow-up, support and entrepreneurial training must be amongst measures to support the process.

97. The international community has an important role to play as well. The World Bank pinpointed⁶⁷ that global collective action is needed to remove barriers to trade and provide preferential access to the poorest countries. Elimination of barriers by industrial countries and emerging markets in some key areas (agriculture, labour intensive manufactures and services) can bring large benefits to developing countries.

98. The international community should also do more to help prevent conflict and support countries emerging from conflict. Wars and civil conflict remain major factors which hold back several of the poorest countries, and threaten many others. Better conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms can have huge payoffs in reducing human suffering and deprivation in which the poor suffer the most. It will always be very costly for the international community to pay for military intervention to stop or contain a conflict. Large financial resources – and many human lives – could be saved if global collective action could help prevent conflict by appropriate and timely measures.⁶⁸

62. *Poverty Among Us, Part A: An analytical approach*, p. 18.

63. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,print:Y~isCURL:Y~contentMDK:22789247~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:336992,00.html>.

64. Guideline 7 of the UNHCHR Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies, p. 6.

65. “Modern economic organisation provides a national dividend potentially large enough to obviate individual want. There is nothing inherent in competitive industry whereby this dividend need be so apportioned as to create great areas of poverty. The misdirections, not the normal working, of twentieth-century industrialism leave large elements of the community in receipt of incomes less than enough to maintain, in the long run, decent, self-supporting existence for themselves and those necessarily dependent upon them. These insufficiently provided classes – the great supply-sources of poverty – are the underpaid, the unemployed, the unemployable.” (p. 38) [...] “Now, in our own day, the conquest of poverty looms up as an economic possibility, definitely within reach – if only society desire it sufficiently and will pay enough to achieve it” (p. 41), Jacob Harry Hollander, *The Abolition of Poverty*, General Books, USA.

66. Grameen Bank and BRAC are the two world projects that had proven the importance of supporting social enterprise. The experience of BRAC is presented by Ian Smillie in his book *Freedom from want: the remarkable success story of BRAC, the global grassroots organisation that's winning the fight against poverty*, Kumarian Press, 2009.

67. *Poverty in an Age of Globalisation*, The World Bank, October 2000, p. 11.

68. *Ibid*, p. 12.

99. People in poverty have to mobilise links that help them get out of poverty: family, community, basic social services, schools, etc, which is not always easy. Community mediation may be of great help in this respect. Solidarity and social cohesion should be further strengthened. Social community-based networks to support people in difficult situations and personal crises have existed for many years. Charity organisations play an active role in providing support to people in poverty, and we should not forget that.

100. Finally, we should stress the role of civil society in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Civil society contributes to a shift in attitudes to dissipate prejudices and to promote full inclusion of the poor, and these efforts should be further supported. Moreover, international NGOs contribute substantially to the shaping of European policies, through, for instance, the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, or through their participation in the work of the European Union bodies.

6. Prevention of intergenerational transmission of poverty: the role of the family

101. Poverty can last a lifetime if nothing is done to prevent it. Children growing up in poverty and social exclusion are less likely than other children to do well at school, enjoy school and stay out of trouble. Once poor children become adults, they may find it difficult to get work and they struggle to find their place in society. Low lifetime incomes provide a poor return for pensions, which contribute to the fact that around 17% of older men and 22% of older women are at risk of poverty in Europe. Problems also occur in reverse, as younger people help out parents who have lost their jobs or who are struggling to make ends meet on small pensions.

102. The Coalition on Intergenerational Solidarity stresses the importance of having affordable access to quality services for children, adults and the elderly to prevent poverty and social exclusion. The Coalition believes that education in early years and care services can help to break the transmission of poverty while providing a healthy environment for the development of young children and a means of strengthening parenting skills.

103. The recommendations on “Intergenerational Solidarity: Strengthening Economic and Social Ties” of the United Nations Expert Group meeting from 23 to 25 October 2007 call for a renewal of the intergenerational contract. Experts highlighted, amongst other measures, the need for policies that allow families to manage the responsibilities of family care and work. When there is no possibility to access service provision, the care for younger children, older adults and other dependants is provided by family members. This, however, requires time. Programmes to promote flexibility in work scheduling and other supportive work programmes should, therefore, be encouraged to enable families to balance care with work, and to be less dependent on social support services.

104. In its [Resolution 1720 \(2010\)](#) on investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis,⁶⁹ the Assembly draws member states attention to the need to take measures “reconciling work and family life by promoting family-friendly workplaces for women and men: quality childcare, flexible work arrangements, suitable forms of parental leave and other types of care that are necessary, not only for young children but also for other family members as a result of disability, old age or illness, and other modes of financial support by means of allowances or tax relief ... These measures must address both women and men, as current flexible employment schemes have a higher take-up rate among women, which in reality perpetuates the gender divide with regard to paid and unpaid work and impacts on women’s decisions to have children or not” (paragraph 6.9).

105. Provision of care and other social services, which require investing an appropriate amount of time, is often unpaid. The recent OECD study on “Cooking, caring and volunteering: unpaid work around the world”⁷⁰ draws attention to the fact that between one third and one half of all valuable economic activity, in the 29 countries considered by the study, is not accounted for in the traditional measures of well-being, such as GDP per capita. In general, people spend on average 3.4 hours per 24-hour day on unpaid work, the equivalent of 14% of their time. In all countries, women do more of such unpaid⁷¹ work than men. The gender gap is on average 2 hours and 28 minutes per 24-hour day (this includes, in a traditional family setting, time spent in the kitchen and caring for the children while men are at work). Routine housework is the largest component of unpaid work.

69. Accompanied by [Recommendation 1912 \(2010\)](#).

70. Veerle Miranda, in OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 116, OECD publishing.

71. For example, cooking a meal for visiting friends, helping in a soup kitchen for homeless people or mowing the lawn of an elderly person.

106. This study triggered a lot of debate and generated a series of proposals, one of which was to integrate unpaid work into the calculations of generated wealth.⁷² This would call for a review of the current use of indicators, such as the GDP, which can influence public policies concerning wealth generation and distribution.

107. Families are confronted with poverty-generating risks. Women raising children alone are at risk of poverty. Moreover, having more than two children could lead to poverty as well. The current economic systems use, for their calculation of household income, a model that counts, as a household, a family of four: a married couple with two children. It is assumed that a male bread-winning head of family supports the family, providing adequate income for all. However, the reality is different; other members of the household do not, in practice, have access to the “household” income. The so-called “black box” of income distribution in a family, which hides the real access to income by women and children, needs to be kept in mind when public policies to support family income are designed.

108. The economic crisis has worsened the situation experienced by a great number of families all over Europe. As stressed by the Assembly in its [Resolution 1720 \(2010\)](#), member states should take specific measures to make their policies more “family-friendly”. The Assembly stresses that member states should consider “providing families with adequate support ... on the grounds that the family is a social asset which generates important benefits for society”.

109. In this resolution, the Assembly invites member states to pay “particular attention to young people’s access to stable jobs, affordable housing and other types of social support so that they are able to start a family and raise children in a safe and caring environment” and to develop “social housing programmes especially targeted at young couples and large families” (paragraph 6.4).

110. The Assembly also encourages member states to give consideration to “tackling social exclusion, disruptions and poverty, particularly of single-parent families, families at risk, large families and migrant families. Discussions on different family models should focus on the consequences that divorce can have on children, including the risk of poverty, school failure, unemployment and other forms of social exclusion” (paragraph 6.6).

111. As I already mentioned in the report on investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis,⁷³ I believe that good relations within the family reduce the need for public services and welfare intervention. In this sense, strong family ties contribute to strengthening social cohesion.

112. Solidarity⁷⁴ and family offer a higher degree of well-being. The welfare state has its origins in solidarity. If equity and solidarity do not function in a state system, a person can fall into material poverty. Intergenerational solidarity can help provide the networks that prevent marginalisation and social exclusion. It encourages young and old to help each other and provides a way of ensuring that all members of society are valued. This, however, cannot replace sound public policies to prevent poverty.

113. I would also like to point out the importance of promoting volunteering, as it contributes substantially to social cohesion. Volunteering strengthens solidarity, and therefore can be an additional means for combating poverty. Last year, the Assembly adopted [Resolution 1778 \(2010\)](#) and [Recommendation 1948 \(2010\)](#) on promoting volunteering in Europe. The Assembly invites member states to take a series of measures to promote volunteering, namely to promote policies in favour of voluntary service, sign and ratify the European Convention on the promotion of a transnational long-term voluntary service for young people (ETS No. 175), consider introducing tax-deductibility of donations made to voluntary service associations, create an instrument for assessing the value of voluntary service in order to enhance its recognition by the political authorities, develop a system for official recognition of informal learning and skills developed through experiences with voluntary service, etc.

114. With a view to guaranteeing access to food for all, [Resolution 1778 \(2010\)](#) invites member states to promote “food banks” ensuring voluntary collection of foodstuffs from private individuals or companies and distributing them free of charge to needy families and individuals.

72. Arnaud Bihel, *Travail non-marchand et inégalité de genre: les calculs de l'OCDE*.

73. See [Doc. 12103](#), report on investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis. Rapporteur: Mr Luca Volontè, Italy, EPP/CD.

74. Solidarity today, however, is not as strong as it was immediately after the Second World War. Societal connections are broken: there is more individualism and less community connections. Strengthening social cohesion involving all actors, including the poorest, is absolutely essential.

115. The European Union launched in 2011 the European Year of Volunteering,⁷⁵ which aims to get more people involved in volunteering. The Assembly stressed⁷⁶ that Council of Europe member states should support this initiative. The merits of volunteering should be promoted, in particular in the countries which are not members of the European Union.

7. Making the investments needed to end poverty

116. Member states should invest, as there is no security and development without investment. Such investment should cover:

- human capital: health, nutrition and skills needed for each person to be economically productive;
- business capital: machinery, facilities, motorised transport used in agriculture, industry and services;
- infrastructure: roads, power, water and sanitation, airports and seaports, telecommunication systems, which are critical inputs into business productivity;
- natural capital: arable land, healthy soils, biodiversity, and well-functioning ecosystems that provide the environmental services needed by society;
- public institutional capital: the commercial law, judicial systems, government services and policing that underpin the peaceful and prosperous division of labour;
- knowledge capital: the scientific and technological know-how that raises productivity output and the promotion of physical and natural capital.⁷⁷

117. The recent rise in the over-indebtedness of states represents a real danger to democracy and human rights. In 2010, public debt rose considerably, reaching 125% of GDP in Greece, 118.2% in Italy, 86% in Portugal, 83.6% in France, 79.1% in the United Kingdom and 78.8% in Germany. States in poverty cannot meet their obligations to their citizens. If nothing is done to prevent over-indebtedness, states risk being unable to uphold their duties to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Such trends are very dangerous for the future of Europe, so I hope that the forthcoming report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development on the over-indebtedness of states will provide a substantial basis for debate in this Assembly, and that appropriate solutions are found as a result.

118. Over-indebtedness prevents countries from investing in their economic and technological recovery and that of their people. If nothing is done, poverty is perpetuated.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

119. Leaving people in poverty is politically unwise. It generates losses and destroys the social fabric, preventing countries' growth and prosperity for future generations and tearing down the values on which Europe was built: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

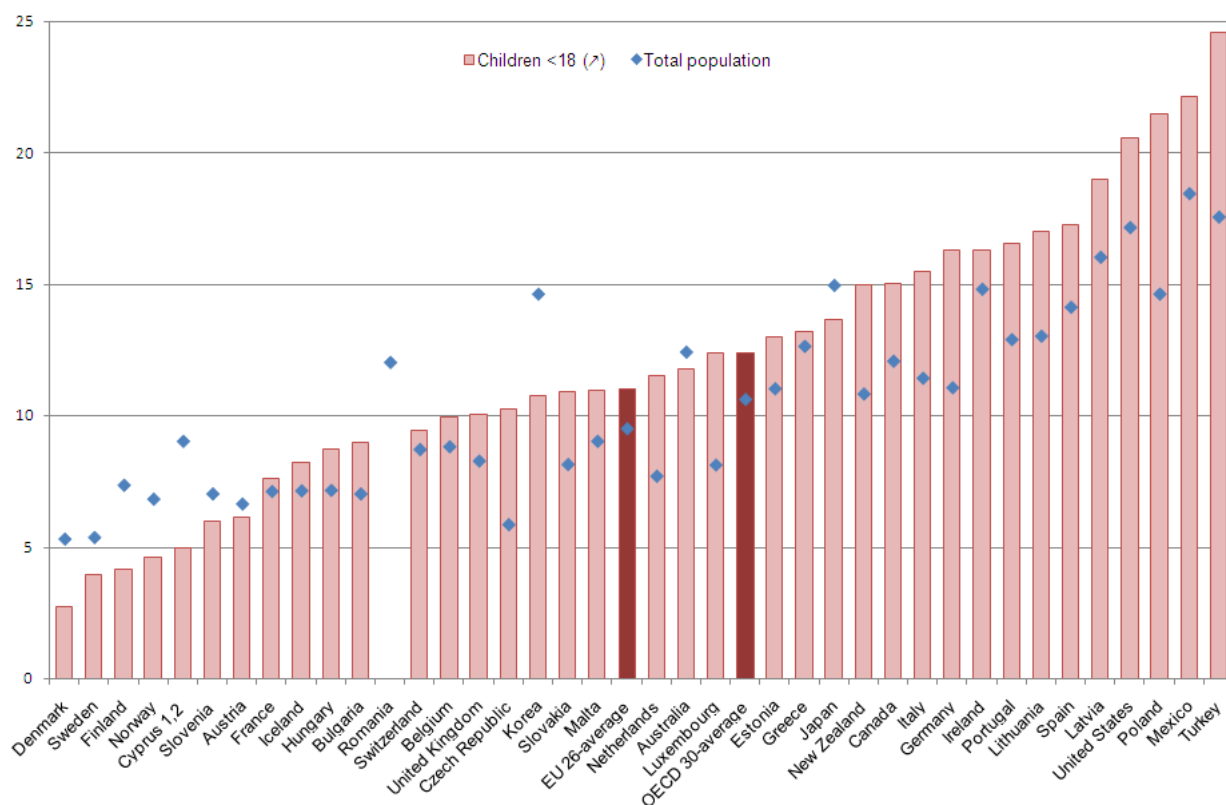
120. The Assembly should call clearly for a paradigm shift in public policymaking that would ensure that human rights, including social rights, become the foundation of all policymaking in Europe, touching upon all areas of life – from the economic sphere to health and family policies, to internal security and poverty eradication – and applying to all people without discrimination, including those who are in poverty.

121. This report should therefore trigger immediate action to protect the human rights of people in poverty. We, as parliamentarians, are in a position to help improve people's lives by asking our governments to take seriously their responsibilities towards people experiencing poverty.

75. <http://europa.eu/volunteering/en/home2>.

76. See paragraph 5.1 of [Resolution 1778 \(2010\)](#) on promoting volunteering in Europe.

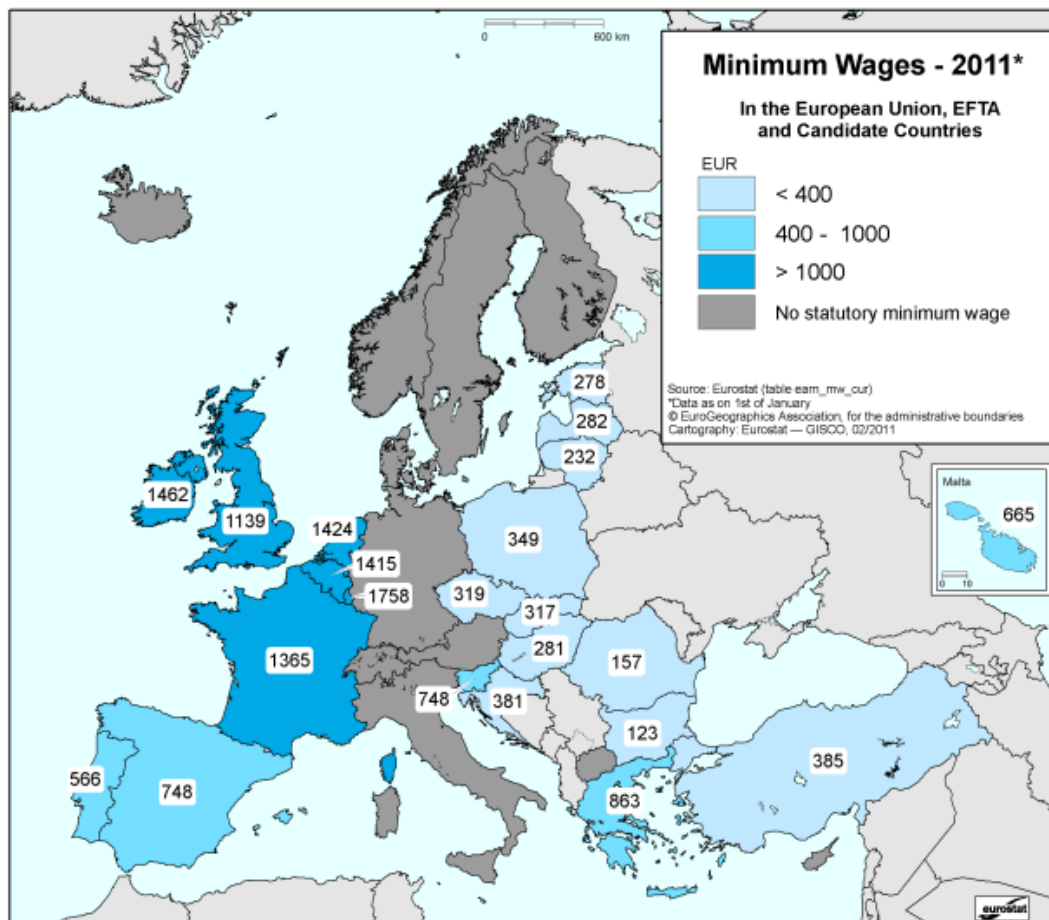
77. Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty, How we can make it happen in our lifetime*, Penguin Books, 2005, pp. 244-259.

Appendix 1 – Poverty rates for children and the total population, mid 2000s⁷⁸

78. Source: OECD (2008) and for EU non-OECD countries EU-SILC (2005).

1. Footnote by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to "Cyprus" relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue".

2. Footnote by all the European Union member states of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Appendix 2 – Minimum wages in the European Union member states⁷⁹

79. Source: Eurostat, 10 February 2011.