Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 893 (1980)[1]

Poverty in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Noting that, despite a relatively high standard of living, there still exists in European societies a section of the population whose income is considerably below the average, and whose living conditions and accommodation are often at variance with the standards generally accepted ;

2. Being aware that, in addition to poverty passed on from one generation to another, new groups find themselves in a precarious situation because of economic conditions and demographic changes ;

3. Emphasising that the situation of these sectors of the population is characterised not only by material difficulties but also by social exclusion, lack of participation in civic, political and cultural life, and difficulties in fitting into the educational system ;

4. Regretting that European public opinion is largely unaware of both the existence and scope of the problem of poverty ;

5. Considering that, at a time when a dialogue between rich and poor countries is being initiated, the member states of the Council of Europe should show greater determination to eliminate the inequalities in their midst ;

6. Convinced that a campaign by the Council of Europe in different fields would not only make it possible to achieve more concrete results in specific areas, but also show that the fight against poverty and social exclusion represents a common concern of member states,

7. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

In the short term

i. set up, in co-ordination with governments and local authorities, at the Council of Europe, a specialised working party to take stock of poverty in the member states, with specific reference to children, determining the common factors and formulating general aims to be examined in greater depth in specialised activities within the Council of Europe's work programme ;

ii. ask the governments of the member states to examine whether their institutions provide adequately for co-ordinating the work of governments and local authorities in dealing with the cumulative effects of poverty on children ;

iii. ask member states to define the acceptable income level capable in industrial societies of covering basic needs, and to guarantee this income by granting allowances and services which should be universal and simplified so that it can be assumed that the most underprivileged sections of the population do not lose the benefit of them ;

1. Assembly debate on 24 April 1980 (6th and 7th Sittings) (see Doc. 4508, report of the Committee on Social and Health Questions). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 April 1980 (7th Sitting).

iv. ask the Resettlement Fund, which operates under the aegis of the Council of Europe, to adopt an encouraging attitude towards the social housing projects submitted by member states and, above all, give priority to those projects especially designed to benefit the most underprivileged sections of the population, with the principal aim of gradually abolishing slums, shanty towns and unhealthy housing accommodation ;

v. ask the member states to set up machinery, in particular to enable persons in straitened circumstances to have access to justice, by setting up legal information centres in the most impoverished districts and urban and rural regions, and by informing these persons about their rights under social and other legislation ;

vi. work out measures whereby given rights would be granted automatically, irrespective of application, particularly allowances for which application procedure is too complicated, or even humiliating for the persons concerned who often refrain for these reasons from availing themselves of such rights ;

II. In the medium term

vii. prepare proposals for the attention of member states, for the purpose of overcoming ignorance and prejudice in respect of poor people, starting with public authorities who often tend to consider such persons as "maladjusted" or "social cases" ;

viii. give individuals the right to services and facilities in the area of social policy, by incorporating in Council of Europe normative instruments, such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the Social Charter, the right to a regular minimum income, to decent dwelling accommodation and to vocational training ;

ix. re-examine the contents of the right to education, and work out measures to ensure that it is effectively applied at the bottom of the social scale, by including, for instance, in the Council of Europe's medium-term plan, a programme to eradicate illiteracy in member states by different means ;

x. ask those states to ensure that needy parents are provided with adequate means for their children's schooling and that, in the training of teachers, there should be a special attention to the needs of children from poor families ;

xi. invite the member governments to stimulate and facilitate the social and political integration of disadvantaged groups in society and their participation in the democratic process ;

xii. urge member states to reconsider their development programmes, bearing in mind that, irrespective of its secondary reasons, poverty is largely a structural problem rooted in uneven distribution of wealth and inequality of opportunity.