Recommendation 948 (1982)[1]

Fight against unemployment

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Noting that unemployment currently affects approximately 17 million people in the Council of Europe member countries, and that, according to the current economic outlook, this figure is expected to continue to rise throughout at least the next year ;

2. Further noting that, quite apart from the numbers affected, certain qualitative symptoms are more acute now than at any stage since the war, including youth unemployment, unemployment among women, the lengthening of the average duration of unemployment, the proliferation of illicit work, regional imbalances and the worsening plight of migrant workers who in some cases face an upsurge of xenophobia ;

3. Considering that, if this situation continues, it could have extremely serious social and political consequences and pose a threat to democratic institutions ;

4. Noting that some of the causes of the deterioration in the employment situation are structural, such as population trends, technological change and fiercer international competition, with the attendant risk of a return to protectionism ;

5. Pointing out, however, that policies which underestimate the State's responsibility for achieving and maintaining full employment and rely solely on a self-regulating free market have proved more and more incapable of bringing the situation under control ;

6. Considering that strategies based only on growth and the market's traditional powers of recovery can no longer be realistically viewed as effective against unemployment and its effects, but that the appropriate context is an active social policy pursued by member states in concert ;

7. Regretting that the right to work, which is widely acknowledged as a fundamental social right and is no more than a safeguard enabling every individual to earn his own livelihood, is still far from having constitutional force in all member states ;

8. None the less recalling the fundamental principles laid down in Article 1 of the European Social Charter, which contains an undertaking to create conditions for the effective exercise of the right to work, inter alia by achieving and maintaining a high and stable level of employment ;

9. Being convinced that the success of measures against unemployment will depend largely on the achievement of a social consensus which requires sincere solidarity on the part of everyone in employment, in particular in the framework of negotiations between management and labour which should be conducted in a spirit of collective responsibility towards their "third partner", those who are unemployed ;

10. Considering that some fifteen million foreigners - migrant workers and their families - are living in Council of Europe member countries, and that their number is growing every year as a result of family reunion and births ;

---

1. Assembly debate on 30 September 1982 (11th Sitting) (seeDoc. 4953. report of the Committee on Social and Health Questions Text adopted by the Assembly on 30 September 1982 (11th Sitting).

11. Considering that migrant workers have contributed substantially to the economic expansion of the immigration countries during the past twenty years, and that the economy of many European countries will still need their help in the future ;

12. Recognising that central government's responsibility for combating unemployment, and the measures this necessarily entails, can usefully be supplemented from the potential available to regional and local authorities ;

13. Considering it logical that, instead of paying a high price for the consequences of unemployment :

a. new jobs should be created by State and State-sponsored investment and this investment should be economically rational ;

b. viable private investment should be encouraged by public aid, which should be linked to the creation of new jobs ;

c. this aid could be funded by taxes and levies imposed over a limited period of time, the principle of solidarity requiring that those in remunerated employment should contribute towards surmounting the unemployment of others, and that this contribution should respect the principles of social justice ;

14. Recognising that a reorganisation of working time could make a major contribution to reducing unemployment ;

15. Being convinced that, among the various possible strategies, whether geared to increasing the volume of work available or to redistributing it, priority must go to those whose implementation does not involve long delays,

16. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers call on the governments of member states :

16.1. to make it their policy to aid investment in schemes which are likely to result in protection of existing jobs or creation of new jobs ;

16.2. to pay special attention to labour-market policies, fiscal incentives and other selective measures with a view to increasing significantly investment and employment in both the public and private sectors ;

16.3. to promote decentralisation of opportunities to work and greater worker mobility by setting up, in association with local authorities, programmes of relocation aid, possibly with provision for removal and rehousing grants ;

16.4. to develop, as key features of occupational life, programmes of initial and further vocational training, inter alia :

by instituting a compulsory year of basic vocational training at the end of normal schooling, designed, in particular, to meet the needs of the new technologies and with the object of reducing the number of young people without vocational qualifications ;

by developing means to assist the transition from theoretical instruction to the reality of working life, for example the alternation of instruction with work experience (training en alternance), which both young people and older workers with adjustment problems require ;

by requiring enterprises either to develop their training arrangements or pay a payroll and turnover tax to help finance the provision of training ;

16.5. to take vigorous action against illicit work, impose strict limits on overtime and introduce regulations on temporary work- which has increased alarmingly- in order to safeguard fully workers' economic and social rights ;

16.6. to enforce the prohibition of children's employment ;

16.7. to consider the following measures to reorganise time at work :

a. a general reduction in the working year through measures to introduce greater flexibility and give the individual greater freedom of choice by :

1. a gradual shortening of the working week and working day by means of collective sectoral negotiation ;

2. longer annual holidays and general provision for extended (sabbatical) leave ;

3. more opportunities for part-time work, together with adequate social protection ;

4. the introduction of a fifth team for continuous shift work ;

b. measures to shorten working life, such as adjustments in pension schemes to enable individuals to decide their age of retirement, financial inducements to retire early, pre-retirement arrangements offering shorter hours in the final years of working life in order to ease the transition to retirement ;

16.8. to take into account the measures recommended in Committee of Ministers Resolution (78) 4, on the social and economic impact on migrant workers of economic recession or crisis, bearing especially in mind the principle that migrant workers and their families should not be used as a pool of reserve labour, deprived of security of employment, for correcting market fluctuations ;

16.9. to grant second generation migrants a legal status recognising the right to remain and to work in the receiving country ;

16.10. to ratify the European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers, which has not yet entered into force since it has been ratified by only four states : Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Turkey ;

16.11. to continue to give priority to questions relating to migrants in the Council of Europe medium-term plan and the Intergovernmental Work Programme ;

16.12. to have regard, in all bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, to fundamental social rights and international labour regulations in the "cheap labour countries", with a view to approximating their social welfare standards to those of Europe, and to ensure that free competition is not distorted by inequalities in labour costs ;

17. Calls on the Committee of Ministers to forward this recommendation to the governments of member states without delay, with a particular view to its discussion at the 2nd Conference of European Ministers for Labour, to be held in 1983 ;

18. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers implement within the Council of Europe the principles set out in this recommendation, particularly as regards the flexible lowering of the retirement age and regulations governing temporary work.