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Equality and the crisis

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Rapporteur: Mr Igor KOLMAN, Croatia, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development supports the report prepared by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination and congratulates its rapporteur, Mr Nikolaj Villumsen, on his synthesis of this large and complex subject of equality and the crisis.

2. In the last few years, the committee has continuously drawn attention to the dramatic effects of the economic crisis on human rights, in particular on social and economic rights, be it in reports specifically dedicated to this issue² or in the framework of other reports within the scope of its mandate.³ A report also linked to the impact of the crisis and entitled "Protection of the right to bargain collectively, including the right to strike" will be debated in the plenary jointly with Mr Villumsen's report. Moreover, two other reports closely related to this topic are currently under preparation in the committee.⁴ Mr Villumsen's report confirms, unfortunately, most of the previous findings of the committee, but above all it brings added value by focusing on the impact of the crisis from an equality perspective.

3. The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development wishes to propose some amendments in order to further strengthen the draft resolution from both an equality and social rights perspective and ensure utmost coherence between different texts adopted by the Assembly.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 7.5 of the draft resolution, after the words "promote and encourage the participation of vulnerable categories of people" insert the following words:

" , in particular young people, "

1. Reference to committee: Reference 3973 of 24 June 2013. Reporting committee: Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. See [Doc. 13661](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 26 January 2015.

2. See Resolutions [1884 \(2012\)](#) "Austerity measures – a danger for democracy and social rights" and [1885 \(2012\)](#) "The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis".

3. See Resolutions [1882 \(2012\)](#) on decent pensions for all, [1946 \(2013\)](#) on equal access to health care, [1993 \(2014\)](#) on decent work for all, [1995 \(2014\)](#) on ending child poverty in Europe and [2024 \(2014\)](#) "Social exclusion: a danger for Europe's democracies".

4. "Towards a new European Social Model" and "Improving children's access to child-friendly health and social services".



Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 7.7 of the draft resolution, after the words “ensure adequate funding” insert the following words:

“to programmes for preventing and combating violence against women as well as”.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 7.8 of the draft resolution, add the following words:

“and foster the implementation of proposals laid out in Resolution (1885) 2012 on the young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis”.

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 7.10 of the draft resolution, before the words “minimum income”, insert the word “adequate”.

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

Replace paragraph 8.1 of the draft resolution with the following text:

“further promote the full ratification and implementation of the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) as well as the Additional Protocol providing for a system of Collective Complaints (ETS No. 158) and the Protocol amending the European Social Charter (ETS No. 142, “Turin Protocol”) providing for the election of the members of the European Committee of Social Rights by the Assembly”.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Kolman, rapporteur for opinion

1. In its [Resolution 1885 \(2012\)](#) “The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis”, the Parliamentary Assembly expressed deep concern about the fact that the young generation in Europe was disproportionately hit by unemployment, underemployment, poverty and exclusion, and that without tangible improvement, Europe risked not only producing a “lost generation” of disillusioned people, but also undermining its political stability and social cohesion, justice and peace, as well as its long-term competitiveness and development prospects in the global context. The elements contained in the report (paragraphs 45 to 49) confirm these concerns.
2. Following this line of thinking, I propose to add a particular reference to “young people” in the draft resolution where it recommends promoting and encouraging the participation of vulnerable categories of people in recovery planning. I understand that the draft resolution’s focus is on equality and I do not mean to minimise the importance of involving other vulnerable categories of people in the process, including women and migrants. I find, however, that it is important to put an emphasis on young people’s participation in the recovery planning, not only for equality purposes, but also because their involvement is crucial for the future of our continent. As the Assembly rightly suggested in its [Resolution 1885 \(2012\)](#), adequately supporting young people today, even in times of austerity, is the best investment Europe can make for its future vitality and quality growth (Amendment A).
3. In its paragraph 7.8, the draft resolution recommends that member States combat youth unemployment and social exclusion of young people. Considering that [Resolution 1885 \(2012\)](#) contains concrete measures regarding youth employability, social protection and the promotion of active citizenship and social dialogue, I propose to add a specific reference to this text (Amendment C).
4. The report draws attention to the fact that the economic crisis has had an overall negative impact on women victims of violence in so far as they are more hesitant to leave their homes or ask their partner to leave and are reluctant to file a complaint. This of course is largely due to economic precariousness and has also disastrous effects on children witnessing such violence. While I entirely support the recommendation on adequately funding assistance and protection services for victims of violence, I believe that ensuring such services is only one of the many aspects of the protection of women against violence. Therefore, in terms of adequate funding, I propose to add a reference to programmes for preventing and combating such violence in general (Amendment B).
5. Article 23 of the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) stipulates that member States should provide elderly persons with “adequate resources enabling them to lead a decent life and play an active part in public, social and cultural life”. When assessing adequate resources, the European Committee of Social

Rights takes into account all social protection measures guaranteed to elderly people and aimed at maintaining an income level allowing them to lead a decent life. In particular, the Committee examines pensions and other complementary cash benefits available to elderly people. These resources are then compared with median equivalenced income, considering that the Committee considers pensions and social assistance levels to be appropriate where the monthly amount of benefits – basic and/or additional – paid to a person living alone is not manifestly below the poverty threshold (set at between 40% and 50% of the median equivalised income).

6. In the spirit of the Charter, the draft resolution recommends that member States guarantee a minimum income for older people. In view of the explanations above, I propose to make clear that the said minimum income should be “adequate”, knowing that adequacy should be interpreted in conformity with the decisions of the European Committee of Social Rights (Amendment D).

7. Finally, I propose to reformulate the recommendation concerning the ratification of the European Social Charter with a view to harmonising it with the Declaration adopted by the Sub-Committee on the European Social Charter on the occasion of the High-level Conference held last October in Turin. In this Declaration, the sub-committee – which participated in the Conference on behalf of the Assembly – called on European governments and parliaments to strengthen the protection of social rights and related mechanisms through a series of concrete measures, including the ratification of the European Social Charter (revised), the Additional Protocol providing for a system of Collective Complaints (ETS No. 158) as well as the Protocol amending the European Social Charter (ETS No. 142, “Turin Protocol”) providing for the election of the members of the European Committee of Social Rights by the Assembly (Amendment E).