Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2032 (2015)[1]
Final version

Equality and the crisis

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The economic crisis has hit the majority of Council of Europe member States with a long-term impact on the population which goes beyond the economic sphere. The crisis has resulted in higher unemployment, has undermined social cohesion, and is responsible for greater poverty, rising inequalities and income gaps, increasing discrimination and intolerance, social tensions and rising support for populist political parties and movements.

2. Austerity measures have been one of the main responses to the crisis. The Parliamentary Assembly is deeply concerned that, by undermining equal opportunities and cutting funding for social programmes and equality bodies, the economic crisis and austerity measures have had a negative impact on the enjoyment of human rights and equality, disproportionately affecting vulnerable categories of people, including women, young people, people with disabilities, older people and migrants.

3. The economic crisis has also diminished the level of trust in the political system and weakened the spirit of solidarity in society. When exercising their role of democratic scrutiny, parliaments should assess the human rights impact of measures proposed by governments.

4. A responsible response to the economic crisis should take into account its potential impact on the population with a long-term perspective and cannot take the form of short-term measures only. Budgetary cuts should not be blind to human rights and equality. In this respect, human rights and equality impact assessments are essential in order to take informed decisions and mitigate, as far as possible, the impact of austerity measures on vulnerable categories of people.

5. Maintaining a high level of social protection and combating inequalities can contribute to stimulating growth and to reducing poverty in the long term. Positive measures to protect vulnerable categories of people and their participation in society should be preserved as far as possible so as to guarantee social protection floors and social cohesion and to prevent a backlash against social rights. The Assembly is convinced that social justice is beneficial in the long term, both economically and socially. By ensuring the accountability of decision makers, investing in equality and working for inclusion and a participatory approach, everyone can contribute to promoting a vision of society based on solidarity and respect for human rights.

6. Human rights standards include a positive obligation for States to identify groups at risk and take into account their vulnerabilities when formulating policies. In this regard, the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) is a key instrument for the protection of social rights, including in times of economic crisis. The Assembly welcomes the ratification of the European Social Charter (revised) by 33 member States and hopes they will be followed by others as soon as possible.

7. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the member States to:

7.1. invest in equality as a way of tackling the economic crisis and take measures to mitigate its impact on the most vulnerable categories of people;

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1. *Assembly debate* on 28 January 2015 (6th Sitting) (see Doc. 13661, report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Mr Nikolaj Villumsen; and Doc. 13683, opinion of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Mr Igor Kolman). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 28 January 2015 (6th Sitting).

7.2. carry out human rights and equality impact assessments in co-operation with national human rights institutions and take into account a long-term perspective when developing economic and social policy responses to the crisis;

7.3. facilitate increased co-operation with social partners and organise regular consultations with representatives of national human rights institutions, social partners and civil society in order to discuss a co-ordinated approach to the economic crisis and to adjust policies according to needs;

7.4. set up, where relevant, structures based on the model of the Icelandic Welfare Watch in order to ensure dialogue and tackle the disproportionate impact and the cumulative effects of the crisis and of austerity measures on vulnerable categories of people;

7.5. promote and encourage the participation of vulnerable categories of people, in particular young people, in recovery planning;

7.6. step up efforts to combat gender-based discrimination in the labour market, including maternity discrimination;

7.7. ensure adequate funding for programmes to prevent and combat violence against women as well as for assistance and protection services for victims of domestic or sexual violence;

7.8. give more attention to and invest in combating youth unemployment and the social exclusion of young people and foster the implementation of the proposals laid out in Resolution 1885 (2012) "The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis";

7.9. adopt policies that guarantee the rights of people with disabilities and allow them to live independently and enjoy full inclusion in society;

7.10. ensure that older people can live in dignity by guaranteeing an adequate minimum income, promoting social inclusion and combating abuse and discrimination;

7.11. step up efforts to combat the rise of racism and xenophobia and condemn hate speech, irrespective of the economic context;

7.12. ensure adequate funding for national human rights institutions allowing them to carry out their mandate.

8. The Assembly calls on the parliaments of member States to:

8.1. further promote the full ratification and implementation of the European Social Charter (revised) 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;

8.2. exercise parliamentary oversight over governmental responses to the economic crisis, by asking for human rights and equality impact assessments to be carried out, if they have not already been done;

8.3. organise parliamentary debates on the impact of the economic crisis on the most vulnerable categories of people;

8.4. ensure legislative follow-up to decisions of the European Committee of Social Rights;

8.5. increase co-operation with national human rights institutions and social partners, involving them in the design of measures to counter the economic crisis, and to increase dialogue with non-governmental organisations on the response to the economic crisis.

9. The Assembly encourages non-governmental organisations active in this sector to continue advocating social dialogue and to pursue their awareness-raising activities with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights, including economic and social rights, and the impact of the economic crisis on the most vulnerable categories of people.