



Doc. 14462 – Compendium of written amendments
22/01/2018

(Final version)

The case for a basic citizenship income

Contents	Page
A. Draft Resolution	2

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1. Modern Europe has built impressive prosperity through development centred on human needs and rights. Its social model is now under strain following changes in economic structures, the nature of work and demographic profiles, with poverty and increasing inequalities undermining human dignity ever more. European States must shoulder their reform responsibilities so that present and future generations can continue to enjoy decent living conditions and adequate social protection. It is in this context that the case for a basic, or so-called citizenship, income has been put forward in the public debate.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that a decent standard of living for all is a cornerstone of social justice and human dignity. Whereas most European countries have put in place income support mechanisms to guarantee a strict minimum for the needy, nearly all of them have been asked to improve their systems in response to criticism from the European Committee of Social Rights. The latter has repeatedly highlighted faults in the de facto commitment of States Parties to the European Social Charter to ensure a decent standard of living for all sections of their population, including the more vulnerable groups (such as children, young people and the elderly, the unemployed and the working poor, and disabled people and sick people).
3. Basic, or citizenship, income is a form of social security that can provide each citizen with a regular sum of money to live on: it is “paid by a political community to all its members on an individual basis, without means test or work requirements” [Van Parijs]. Defined as universal, individual, unconditional and sufficient to ensure living in dignity and participation in society, a basic income would relieve absolute poverty whilst removing disincentives to work (as it is not withdrawn when the person earns other revenue). Moreover, it would supplement earnings for those engaged in non-standard forms of work and job-sharing, those who are underemployed or those in unpaid work (such as caring for children or elderly and sick people in one’s family).
4. The Assembly believes that introducing a basic income could guarantee equal opportunity for all more effectively than the existing patchwork of social benefits, services and programmes. However, the Assembly is fully aware of the practical difficulties of such a radical change in social policy. An in-depth debate is necessary in each country to determine the modalities for such a permanently guaranteed income and the ways of funding it as part of a new social contract between citizens and the State.
5. As a matter of priority, the Assembly urges Council of Europe member States to improve the adequacy of their existing minimum income schemes and to ensure in particular that national reference baskets of goods and services cover individuals’ full participation in society. Where appropriate, countries could also consider adopting the “at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion”

indicator (AROPE) used by the European Union institutions.

6. Considering that a possible introduction of a basic income requires intermediary steps to make it affordable through bold revisions in national social protection and taxation systems, the Assembly recommends that the member States:
 - 6.1. study the past and present initiatives of field-testing different formulas of basic income at local, regional or national level;
 - 6.2. enhance support to the vulnerable categories of the population by:
 - 6.2.1. proceeding with the consolidation of existing income support schemes and a critical review of tax levels, breaks and credits so as to identify positive transfers;
 - 6.2.2. streamlining the existing social support systems in order to remove inefficiencies, gaps and overlaps;
 - 6.2.3. expanding efforts to curb tax evasion and avoidance by multinational enterprises and wealthy individuals and reallocating funds thus recuperated to social policy priorities;
 - 6.3. where appropriate, re-examine their income support schemes in the light of the conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights;
 - 6.4. involve all social partners in the process of setting a national benchmark on a minimum subsistence level that enables every citizen to have an income above the poverty line;
 - 6.5. carry out an impact assessment of national minimum income schemes and consider further steps to improve them;
 - 6.6. enhance the coverage and take-up of existing minimum income schemes by:
 - 6.6.1. ensuring that young people over the age of 18 who seek to live on their own have access to minimum income support;
 - 6.6.2. reducing administrative hurdles and eliminating discrimination and arbitrariness in granting income support on a national and local scale;
 - 6.6.3. regularly reviewing national minimum income schemes with a view to making them more simple, cost-effective, transparent, efficiently managed and better co-ordinated with employment services and integration agencies;

Amendment 1

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In the draft resolution, paragraph 6.2, after the words "enhance support to the vulnerable categories of the population", insert the following words: ", with particular attention to migrants,".

- 6.6.4. separating social work and the granting of income support from control and oversight functions;
- 6.6.5. increasing flexibility and eliminating punitive conditionality in examining requests for income support;
- 6.6.6. improving information systems on entitlements and expanding field work for active outreach towards potential recipients of income support among the most fragile categories of the population;
- 6.7. pursue social dialogue and explanatory work with the population on the risks and opportunities inherent in the adoption of basic income;
- 6.8. strengthen income support schemes and other measures of active social inclusion, notably pro-employment policies and quality public services;
- 6.9. stimulate a national public debate on a basic citizenship income in order to prepare the ground for and launch national experiments on a basic income.