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REPORT

on women and poverty in the European Union
(2004/2217(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Rapporteur: Anna Záborská

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on women and poverty in the European Union (2004/2217(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to United Nations General Assembly Resolutions A/RES/46/121, A/RES/47/134 and A/RES/49/179 on human rights and extreme poverty, A/RES/47/196 on observance of an international day for the eradication of poverty and A/RES/50/107 on observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and proclamation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in its Resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948,
- having regard to United Nations Economic and Social Council documents E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13, E/CN.4/1987/NGO/2, E/CN.4/1987/SR.29 and E/CN.4/1990/15 on human rights and extreme poverty, E/CN.4/1996/25 on the right to development and E/CN.4/SUB.2/RES/1996/25 on the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights,
- having regard to the report of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the Beijing Platform for Action programme,
- having regard to the work of the Nobel Prize winner, Gary Becker, on the economics of life¹,
- having regard to the work of the Council of Europe in this area and in particular the revised European Social Charter,
- having regard to its resolution of 4 October 2001 on the United Nations World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty²,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 February 1994 on poverty among women in Europe³,
- having regard to the Community *acquis* in the field of women's rights and gender equality,
- having regard to Articles 136, 137(1) and 141(3) of the Treaty establishing the European Community and especially point (j) of Article 137(1) concerning the combating of social exclusion,
- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council meeting in Nice on 7, 8 and 9 December 2000, Annex I to which contains a call to 'Ensure a follow-up to the 1992 recommendation on minimum guaranteed resources to be provided by social

¹ 'The Economics of Life: From Baseball to Affirmative Action to Immigration, How Real-World Issues Affect Our Everyday Life', with Guity Nashat Becker, McGraw-Hill, 1996.

² OJ C 87 E, 11.4.2002, p. 253.

³ OJ C 77, 14.3.1994, p. 43.

protection systems' and also to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council meeting in Santa Maria da Feira on 19 and 20 June 2000, especially the agreement that indicators should be defined as common references in the fight against social exclusion and the eradication of poverty,

- having regard to Council Recommendation 92/442/EEC of 27 July 1992 on the convergence of social protection objectives and policies¹,
 - having regard to the Social Protection Committee's Report on Indicators in the field of poverty and social inclusion (October 2000),
 - having regard to the revised common objectives for the second round of National Action Plans 'Fight against poverty and social exclusion', 25 November 2002 (SOC 508) and also to the Commission's draft joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (COM(2005)0014),
 - having regard to its position of 14 May 2002 on the proposal for a European Parliament and Council regulation on Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC)²,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0273/2005),
- A. whereas the leitmotif of the World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty (17 October) is 'Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty',
- B. whereas it is essential to promote the emergence of a new Europe based on the creative coexistence of cultures and mentalities and full respect for otherness, in which the concept of responsible freedom does not cover solely the free movement of capital and in which citizens pool their abilities irrespective of their social status so as to harness the creativity and protect the dignity of each citizen for the common good, both in the East and in the West,
- C. whereas in 17 Member States the risk of extreme poverty amongst women greatly exceeds the risk of extreme poverty amongst men,
- D. whereas new forms of poverty and marginalisation exist, in response to which specific, innovative measures must be adopted in order to assist those in need,
- E. whereas the longer the period of living in poverty with a particularly low income, the greater the risk of falling into a state of permanent economic privation and social exclusion; whereas, therefore, measures to combat poverty should not simply aim to help those who are already living in extreme economic deprivation but should also seek promptly to prevent and tackle factors which lead citizens into extreme economic and

¹ (OJ L 245, 26.8.1992, p. 49).

² OJ C 180 E, 31.7.2003, p.68

social deprivation,

- F. whereas, the link between the Beijing Platform for Action and the Lisbon Strategy being obvious, the need to utilise the productive potential of the European labour force is a key to achieving the overall Beijing and Lisbon Strategy goals,
- G. whereas less attention has been paid to the eradication of poverty and the social aspects of the Lisbon Agenda than to price stability, cost-cutting and the budget deficit,
- H. whereas in the Member States the proportion of children and young people living in extreme poverty is higher than average, and whereas extreme poverty is more prevalent among women, who are also the first to defend their next of kin against poverty and social exclusion, because women forge fundamental bonds, promote peace and play a pioneering role in ensuring respect for human rights and universal dignity, with a further aim being enhanced recognition for all women in general,
- I. whereas although globalisation and computerisation have brought greater economic opportunities and autonomy to some women, many others have been marginalised and deprived of the benefits of this process, owing to the related inequalities among and within countries,
- J. whereas the poorest women should be the leading partners in formulating, implementing and assessing equal opportunities policies, since women in situations of chronic poverty are obliged to accept their role and their responsibilities, including their role as mothers, just like any other woman, and they experience the same joys, have the same aspirations, feel the same fears and have the same doubts, but do so in much more difficult material circumstances than the majority of women,
- K. whereas poverty is often closely associated with racial discrimination and related intolerance and these practices worsen the conditions of poverty, marginality and social and economic exclusion of women in minority groups,
- L. whereas employment itself does not constitute adequate protection against extreme poverty; whereas, mainly as a consequence of occupational segregation, more women than men work in lower-paid jobs, whilst it is often the case that social-security payments alone offer no protection against extreme poverty either,
- M. whereas the wage gap between men and women in Europe is still on average between 16% and 33%; whereas there has not been any real progress made with regard to the implementation of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, which was introduced 30 years ago through Council Directive 75/117/EEC¹ on equal pay for men and women, and whereas, compared with 6.6% of men, 30% of working women in the EU have a part-time job, a choice often forced on them by a lack of affordable childcare facilities,
- N. whereas female-headed households earn from 9% to 26% less than their male counterparts, with the UK (26%) leading, followed by Sweden (14%), France (12%), the

¹ OJ L 45, 19.2.1975, p. 19.

Netherlands (11%), Germany (10%) and Italy (9%),

- O. whereas a job constitutes both a source of income and a means of social integration for families and individuals living in poverty, since, apart from providing financial support, it promotes the participation of the individual in society as a whole and helps to develop the individual's personality; whereas a job does not suffice for the purpose of developing citizenship,
- P. whereas the risk of poverty and extreme deprivation also affects people over the age of 65; whereas two-thirds of the population over the age of 65 in Europe are women; whereas the failings of insurance and pension schemes affect those in the weakest position on the labour market, such as women, who work for fewer years, are paid less than men or even perform unpaid work,
- Q. whereas the number of single-parent families has increased in recent years; whereas members of those families run a considerably greater risk of falling into poverty; whereas, moreover, 85% of single-parent households are headed by a woman, which highlights even more the disadvantaged position of women in relation to poverty,
- R. whereas poverty among women cannot be eradicated unless due consideration is given to the role of men in the open coordination method and in national plans for employment and social inclusion,
- S. whereas the problem of domestic violence against women impairs their mental health, leaves them socially isolated and reduces their job performance, which has an adverse impact on their position in their workplace; whereas, moreover, a large percentage of homeless women have left their family home because of the violence inflicted on them and have reached the borderline of extreme social deprivation and poverty,
- T. whereas women who are members of ethnic or religious minorities suffer double discrimination because of their gender and their origin or religion, which very often prevents them from finding a job; whereas, as a result of this situation, these women either live as dependants on their spouses in extreme poverty or are forced to work illegally without social security and in atrocious working conditions,

Indicators and methodology

1. Stresses that poverty and social exclusion cannot be understood solely in economic terms, on the basis of figures, but must also be understood in terms of human rights;
2. Points out that poverty has various manifestations, including a lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure a sustainable livelihood, hunger and malnutrition, ill-health, limited or non-existent access to education and other basic services, increasing mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing, unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion; points out in this context that it is also characterized by lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life;
3. Refers to the Presidency Conclusions of the Barcelona European Council, which commit

the Member States to eliminating obstacles to the participation of women in the labour market and to introducing by 2010 childcare for at least 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age, and for at least 33% of children under three years old; stresses, however, that in order to achieve these objectives, the national, regional or local authorities must step up their financial contribution to the creation and/or operation of high-quality childcare services at affordable prices;

4. Welcomes the Luxembourg Presidency's initiatives regarding the development of gender-specific indicators, and calls on the UK Presidency to continue with this work;
5. Stresses that extreme-poverty situations are conducive to trafficking in women, to prostitution, to violence and more generally to exploitation of all kinds; calls for these consequences of poverty also to be taken into account in the open coordination method and in the Social Policy Agenda;
6. Recognises that the principle of free movement of capital and goods will not, in itself, enable poverty and chronic poverty to be eradicated (especially persistent poverty), and that poverty deprives those affected of opportunities and prevents them from taking part in the life of their community, particularly by making them indifferent to their surroundings;
7. Calls on the Commission and Council to take steps without delay to recognise the informal economy and to quantify the 'economics of life' using gender-specific approaches;
8. Calls accordingly for Eurostat and its counterparts in the Member States to develop, in close cooperation with representatives of groups that can understand the experience of living in extreme poverty, a methodology and indicators broken down by gender, with a view to measuring the impact of poverty and social exclusion on women and on men;
9. Recommends that, on the basis of gender-related statistics, a study be carried out into the effects which the economic and political transformation undergone by the new Member States has had on the actual situation regarding equality between men and women;
10. Calls on the Member States to address the vulnerability of Roma women, who suffer from multifarious forms of discrimination, by:
 - implementing policies to ensure equal rights;
 - keeping data disaggregated according to ethnicity and gender, so as to monitor access to education, health care and employment of Roma women;
11. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to keep records of the cases of women who belong to minority groups and who work with no social security and pension rights, and to help them integrate smoothly into the labour market;

Partnership with the poorest women

12. Deplores the fact that, despite the political will shown to combat poverty and social exclusion through Community strategies, particularly the Lisbon Strategy and the Social

Policy Agenda, the Union has failed adequately to tackle the issue of the feminisation of poverty;

13. Calls for measures to promote at all levels of the decision-making process a close partnership with the poorest women and families, so that the means and resources suited to combating chronic poverty effectively and to eradicating social exclusion can be drawn from their experience;
14. Calls for assessments to be made of the impact of all European legislative measures on the lives of the most disadvantaged groups, with specific reference to women;
15. Calls, in order to make the above-mentioned partnership possible, on all the institutions concerned to adjust the open coordination method and the operational framework for the Social Policy Agenda to the needs of women in situations of poverty;
16. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to involve social partners at local and regional level, whose members include rural women living on the edge of poverty, in social dialogue on the development and implementation of policy concerning education, employment and pension schemes;
17. Calls on the Council and Commission to cooperate closely with the Council of Europe in order to draw on the large amount of work it has performed in this area, and to forward detailed reports on such cooperation to the Parliament on a regular basis;
18. Calls on all parliamentary committees to consider the issue of poverty within their own terms of reference, particularly as it affects women, and to base their deliberations on the experience of the Parliament's European Fourth World Committee intergroup;

Balancing family life and work in a disadvantaged environment

19. Recognises the direct link between economic inequality and female dependency and the inequalities still existing between men and women in terms of access to education, family responsibilities and the general upkeep of a family, and expresses indignation at the fact that (despite legislation which has been in existence for decades yet is still ineffective) the pay gap between the two sexes stood at 16% in 2001 and 15% in 2003; calls accordingly on the Council and Commission to draw up a Green Paper on the matter and to take appropriate steps to put an end to this iniquity;
20. Stresses that unpaid work, which is mainly performed by women, is not systematically recorded in national statistics and is, therefore, not taken into account when employment policy is drawn up by the competent national and Community bodies; calls, therefore, on the Commission and the Member States to compile data relating to unpaid jobs with a view to promoting measures for a fairer distribution of those jobs, which will enable women to take part in the labour market to a greater extent and will also strengthen their economic position and independence;
21. Calls on the Member States to take targeted action to ensure that women in a disadvantaged environment have fair access to public health systems - in particular to primary health care (including the protection of mothers and children) as defined by the

World Health Organisation¹ - and also to gynaecologic and obstetric health care, decent housing, justice, education, training, life-long learning, sport and culture, to prevent the premature abandonment of schooling and facilitate a smooth transition from school to the labour market, and calls on the Commission and Council to integrate the gender dimension in the annual reports on social cohesion;

22. Calls on the Member States to take further concrete steps to develop strategies to increase the net participation of women of all ages, to encourage a gender mainstreaming approach in order to realise the general Lisbon objectives, to handle the differences in pay and to promote working conditions and quality that enable both women and men to participate fully in the labour market;
23. Calls on the Member States to take action to ensure fair access by men and women to social security and pension systems, while allowing for career breaks and part-time working, and to ensure that in pension-insurance subsystems the principle of equal treatment and social justice is applied consistently, in informal sectors, in order to guard against pauperisation of the elderly, with specific reference to women, and calls on the Commission and Council to integrate the gender dimension in the annual reports on social cohesion;
24. Points out that in most EU Member States, social welfare systems do not take sufficient account of the specific conditions of women living in poverty; underlines that the risk of falling into poverty is greater for women than for men, particularly in old age, where social security systems are based on the principle of continuous remunerated employment; points out that in some cases, women do not fulfil this requirement because of interruptions in their work, due to the unbalanced distribution of remunerated and unremunerated work; stresses moreover that older women also face greater obstacles to re-entry into the labour market;
25. Calls on the Member States to ensure that appropriate social security is available for women responsible for the care of sick, elderly or disabled members of their families, and for elderly women who receive a particularly low pension;
26. Calls on the Member States to analyse, in close cooperation with research units and the groups concerned (women, families, entrepreneurs, local authorities and associations), the real needs of women and men in a disadvantaged environment, so as to enable them effectively to balance work and family life, while showing due respect for otherness and gender-specific differences, and calls on the Commission and Council to integrate the gender dimension in the annual reports on social cohesion;
27. Calls on the Member States to devise effective ways of fostering a balance between work and family life for men and fathers as well, with due respect for their national legislation, given that the increased participation by women in the labour market has not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in male involvement in family responsibilities;
28. Calls on the Member States to adopt additional support measures, especially for working

¹ FIFTY-SIXTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY A56/27, Provisional agenda item 14.18, 24 April 2003, International Conference on Primary Health Care, Alma-Ata: twenty-fifth anniversary, report by the Secretariat.

mothers who are members of single-parent families and large families, either by making it easier to find forms of employment with flexible working hours so that they can meet their more extensive family commitments, or by providing suitable childcare facilities;

29. Calls on the Member States to develop appropriate measures to support teenage mothers, who often have difficulty finding jobs and live in poverty owing to their frequently low level of education and social prejudices; considers, moreover, that it would be very useful in this context for Member States to exchange methods and practices, with the emphasis on the practices which various Member States have pursued in the field of preventing teenage pregnancies;
30. Calls for a ban on the placement of children for socio-economic reasons and for measures to be devised and implemented in close cooperation with groups concerned that will enable people in a disadvantaged environment to start a family, so as to ensure that both parents are able fully to exercise their parental responsibility, particularly in situations of chronic poverty;
31. Calls on the Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure the due recording, analysis and study of the factors which lead to domestic violence so that policies can be developed immediately to prevent and deal with the consequences of such violence, such as providing shelter for homeless women who are victims of domestic violence;

Contribution of civil society

32. Commends the daily struggle by the poorest women against extreme poverty and the work performed by those who assist and support them on a voluntary basis;
33. Calls upon the Member States to make a greater effort to improve the availability of social services, in view of the fact that the availability of high-quality social services providing care for children and other family dependents determines whether or not the groups which are at greatest risk (i.e. women who are the heads of single-parent families) are able to work;
34. Pays tribute to the work of NGOs such as Caritas Internationalis and ATD Fourth World and European networks of social-sector NGOs such as the EAPN, which are committed to working with the most disadvantaged groups on a long-term basis;
35. Calls on the Commission substantially to simplify the eligibility criteria imposed on NGOs and the procedures for obtaining European grants, so as to guard against the monopolies on grants that large NGO networks based in Brussels tend to have;
36. Stresses the importance of the European Economic and Social Committee to structured social dialogue, and calls on it to continue to host Fourth World People's Universities meetings, which provide a forum for genuine dialogue between the poorest groups and EU administrators, elected representatives at all levels and representatives of organised civil society, with the special aim of enabling members of the most disadvantaged groups to share viewpoints and to contribute to overcoming extreme poverty, which provides a concrete example of the very best practice at European level in this area;

37. Stresses the importance of Europe's local and regional authorities in the promotion of equality between the sexes and urges them to include gender policy in their decentralised-cooperation projects, so as to provide poor women in particular with access to new information technologies and to microfinancing with which to fund commercial activities;
38. Calls on the Commission and Council to assess the EU's contribution to the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) and its impact within Europe, with particular attention to partnership with the poorest groups and with specific reference to women, and to submit proposals for future action to build on the impetus built up over this first decade;
39. Calls on institutions at all levels to involve themselves closely in the celebrations for the World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty (17 October);

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◦ ◦
40. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission and Council, the Council of Europe and social-sector NGOs.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

This document forms part of a series of reports on poverty and social exclusion in the European Union. It is however, the first in the 'new Europe' to focus specifically on poverty among women. It covers five main thematic areas, namely: poverty as a human rights violation; the development of indicators and a methodology; partnership with the poorest women; balancing family life and work in a disadvantaged environment; and, lastly, the contribution of civil society.

The definition of poverty given in the report reflects the set of resolutions adopted by the EP on respect for fundamental rights in the EU¹: *'The lack of basic security means the absence of one or more of the factors, particularly employment, that enable individuals and families to assume professional, family and social responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. Such a situation may vary in extent, its consequences can vary in gravity and may to a greater or lesser extent be irreversible. The lack of basic security leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects several aspects of life, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future.'*²

Extreme poverty constitutes a violation of human dignity, and yet is difficult to pin down precisely in European and international official texts. Learning from the poorest women what the risks of human rights violations really are so as continually to improve unavoidably inadequate legislation is therefore essential. By confining the scope of human rights solely to the resources available to individuals or families, we make them a matter for legal experts and politicians, when what they are in fact are a societal issue of import to each and every one of us.

Every woman and every man is the bearer of a fundamental inalienable value on which their human dignity is based. The existence in all societies of groups unable to display this value to the rest of society proves that not all members of society have the same ability to enjoy human rights or to use their human dignity as a source of energy, a platform for their own development and a justification for all their human rights.

Effective action to combat poverty among women with a view to eradicating extreme poverty requires a good understanding of the chronic poverty in which women in the 25 Member States of the new EU are living. The aim is to devise a method that is both rigorous and viable and that can be used by people of good will who do not necessarily have any experience in scientific research. Politicians and people in different professions and walks of life should be able to carry out this type of research in order to find out about the situation of the most disadvantaged among their fellow citizens, with specific reference to women.

¹ Teuscher, Tobias, 'Grande pauvreté et droits de l'homme : étude des rapports du Parlement européen sur les droits fondamentaux dans l'Union européenne', *Revue Droit en Quart Monde*, Paris/Bruxelles, 39-40, July 2004, pp. 49-72.

² FRENCH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, Grande pauvreté et précarité économique et sociale, 1987 session, sittings of 10 and 11 February 1987. (Now known as the Wresinski Report.)

There are clearly major shortcomings in the poverty indicators used at European level, which should more accurately reflect the realities of extreme poverty and should allow for socio-economic disparities, which in some cases are very substantial. In addition to the lack of indicators broken down by gender in action to combat poverty, there is also the issue of the involvement of the poorest groups.

Accordingly, the European institutions - particularly the Commission and Eurostat - should provide both pointers and funding with a view to: firstly, determining the economic value of the activities of women and men living with an almost total lack of basic security; and secondly, devising poverty indicators broken down by gender that are capable of accurately reflecting the realities of the daily lives of disadvantaged women and households, including the groups among which extreme poverty is most prevalent, which are the most difficult to identify.

With a view to devising an appropriate methodology, the involvement of the very poor at all stages in the process, alongside the other interested parties, would be extremely useful and effective, since practical experience of living in poverty should be used as the starting point. Paradoxically, however, there is a problem here: how can people who have lived, and are still living, in extremely difficult conditions which bring all involvement in public life to a standstill take part in formulating a methodology that will produce indicators which reflect the real situation in the Member States of the new Europe? It is not simply a matter of someone in the Council or the Commission saying that they will be involved. The institutions will need to bring all their creative powers to bear in wide-ranging discussions on how a methodology can be jointly devised, and will need to draw on the extensive experience of poor persons in associations operating at EU level and in the Member States.

Those engaged in working with the poorest women have understood better than anyone that there is work for each and every one of us to do within our own countries, because the bottom of the social ladder within our own countries is, for many of us, much further away than any destination on the other side of the world. Would it not be true to say that, in many respects, in the new Europe it is easier for people in privileged positions to communicate with their counterparts from other cultures or regimes than for rich and poor within the same Member State to do so?

PROCEDURE

Title	Women and poverty in the European Union	
Procedure number	2004/2217(INI)	
Basis in Rules of Procedure	Rule 45	
Committee responsible Date authorisation announced in plenary	FEMM 18.11.2004	
Committee(s) asked for opinion(s) Date announced in plenary	DEVE 18.11.2004	INTA 18.11.2004
Not delivering opinion(s) Date of decision	DEVE 28.7.2005	INTA 17.1.2005
Enhanced cooperation Date announced in plenary	0.0.0000	
Motion(s) for resolution(s) included in report		
Rapporteur(s) Date appointed	Anna Záborská 14.10.2004	
Previous rapporteur(s)	Anna Záborská	
Discussed in committee	14.9.2005	15.9.2005
Date adopted	15.9.2005	
Result of final vote	for:	20
	against:	0
	abstentions:	8
Members present for the final vote	Edit Bauer, Emine Bozkurt, Hiltrud Breyer, Maria Carlshamre, Edite Estrela, Věra Flasarová, Nicole Fontaine, Lissy Gröner, Livia Járóka, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Urszula Krupa, Astrid Lulling, Angelika Niebler, Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, Marie-Line Reynaud, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Amalia Sartori, Eva-Britt Svensson, Britta Thomsen, Corien Wortmann-Kool, Anna Záborská	
Substitutes present for the final vote	Anna Hedh, Sophia in 't Veld, Elisabeth Jeggle	
Substitutes under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Antonio Masip Hidalgo, Manolis Mavrommatis, Zita Pleštinská	
Date tabled – A6	22.9.2005	A6-0273/2005