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# **REPORT**

on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty  
(2014/2237(INI))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Inês Cristina Zuber

PR\_INI

## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION .....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT.....	18
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE.....	22

## **MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION**

### **on reducing inequalities with a special focus on child poverty (2014/2237(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in New York on 20 November 1989,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in New York on 13 December 2006,
- having regard to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the revised European Social Charter,
- having regard to the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) and the Employment Equality Framework Directive (2000/78/EC),
- having regard to the Commission recommendation of 20 February 2013 entitled ‘Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage’ (C(2013)778),
- having regard to the Commission report entitled ‘Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2012’,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 15 February 2011 entitled ‘An EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child’ (COM(2011)0060),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 16 December 2010 entitled ‘The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion’ (COM(2010)0758),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 4 July 2006 entitled ‘Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child’ (COM(2006)0367) and to Parliament’s resolution thereon of 16 January 2008<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to the Eurofound report ‘Third European Quality of Life Survey - Quality of life in Europe: Impacts of the crisis’,
- having regard to the Eurofound (2013) report ‘Third European Quality of Life Survey - Quality of life in Europe: Social inequalities’,
- having regard to its resolution of 27 November 2014 on the 25th anniversary of the UN

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 41 E, 19.2.2009, p. 24.

Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>1</sup>,

- having regard to its resolution of 4 July 2013 on the impact of the crisis on access to care for vulnerable groups<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 June 2013 on the Commission communication ‘Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion – including implementing the European Social Fund 2014-2020’<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 November 2011 on the European Platform against poverty and social exclusion<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on the face of female poverty in the European Union<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on reducing health inequalities in the EU<sup>6</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 20 October 2010 on the role of minimum income in combating poverty and promoting an inclusive society in Europe<sup>7</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 9 October 2008 on promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, including child poverty, in the EU<sup>8</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 January 2008: Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child<sup>9</sup>,
- having regard to the Save the Children (2014) report ‘Child poverty and social exclusion in Europe’,
- having regard to the UNICEF Office of Research (2014) report ‘Children of the Recession: The impact of the economic crisis on child well-being in rich countries’,
- having regard to the EAPN and Eurochild (2013) report ‘Towards children’s well-being in Europe - explainer on child poverty in the EU’,
- having regard to the Eurochild assessment report (2014) entitled ‘The 2014 National Reform Programmes (NRP) and National Social Reports (NSR) from a child poverty and well-being perspective’,
- having regard to the report from the 11<sup>th</sup> Eurochild conference, which took place from

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<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2014)0070.

<sup>2</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2013)0328.

<sup>3</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2013)0266.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 153 E, 31.5.2013, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 199 E, 7.7.2012, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 199E , 7.7.2012, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 70 E, 8.3.2012, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> OJ C 9 E, 15.1.2010, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> OJ C 41 E, 19.2.2009, p. 24.

26 to 28 November 2014 in Bucharest,

- having regard to the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2012) report ‘Measuring child poverty: New league tables of child poverty in the world’s rich countries’,
  - having regard to the DRIVERS Final Scientific Report: Social Inequalities in early childhood health and development: a European-wide systematic review, London, September 2014,
  - having regard to EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2013,
  - having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 30 September 2009 entitled ‘Work and poverty: towards the necessary holistic approach’,
  - having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 14 July 2010 on ‘Child poverty and children’s well-being’,
  - having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 10 December 2013 on ‘European minimum income and poverty indicators’,
  - having regard to the synthesis report entitled ‘Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage – A study of national policies’ by the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A8-0310/2015),
- A. whereas greater political visibility should be given to fighting child poverty at the highest EU political level if the EU is to meet the Europe 2020 strategy target of reducing the number of people affected by poverty by at least 20 million by 2020;
- B. whereas, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), all children should be guaranteed the right to education, health care services, housing, protection, participation in decisions that affect them, leisure and free time, a balanced diet and the receipt of care in a family environment;
- C. whereas the majority of Member States so far have given little attention to using EU structural funds to fight the alarming and still growing rates of poverty among children in Europe and promote their social inclusion and general well-being;
- D. whereas social inequalities, which have increased due to irresponsible and financially unsustainable government and budgetary policies, contribute significantly to increased child poverty, and whereas children are at greatest risk of poverty in 19 Member States;

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<sup>1</sup> Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, Synthesis report ‘Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage – A study of national policies’, Brussels, 2014.

- E. whereas according to Eurostat the main factors affecting child poverty are wealth-redistribution policies, the effectiveness of government intervention through income support, the provision of enabling services, labour policy<sup>1</sup> and the labour market situation of parents, which is linked to their level of education and the composition of the household in which the children live; whereas increasing employment is an effective instrument for fighting poverty;
- F. whereas one fifth of the EU's total population is under 18; whereas, despite the commitments made, over one in four children now lives at risk of poverty or social exclusion across the EU;
- G. whereas Parliament has repeatedly called for the implementation of the Social Investment Package, and endorses the Commission recommendation entitled 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage', which puts forward a comprehensive policy framework for tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being, based on three pillars, namely access to adequate resources in the framework of the European Social Fund, access to quality and inclusive services, and children's participation in society and decision-making, and which recognises children as rights holders; considers it regrettable, however, that the EU has not taken coherent steps to implement this through the European Semester;
- H. whereas, although the children of parents with very low work intensity are 56.7 % more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion, families with high work intensity remain at risk of child poverty today (in Romania, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Latvia, Slovakia, Poland and Luxembourg);
- I. whereas child poverty stems from the poverty of families, whereas low-income and large families are therefore more at risk of poverty, while income redistribution has a major impact on reducing cycles of social inequality, and whereas deteriorating national wage policies and social protection systems are increasing the risk of poverty and social exclusion, which contributes to growing child poverty, as seen in the Member States with the lowest rates of child poverty, which are also those with the lowest levels of general poverty and inequality;
- J. whereas between 2008 and 2012 the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe (EU27+Norway, Iceland and Switzerland) rose by almost one million, increasing by half a million between 2011 and 2012 alone<sup>2</sup>; whereas according to Eurostat data, in 2013, 26.5 million children in the EU28 were at risk of falling into poverty or social exclusion; whereas in the EU27 the risk of poverty or social exclusion increased between 2008 and 2012 from 26.5 % to 28 %; whereas in 2013, in the Member States of the EU28, 28 % of the total population under 18 was at risk of poverty or social exclusion and, in the vast majority of countries, the risk of poverty and social exclusion is greater for children than for adults;
- K. whereas women are at greater risk of poverty than men and whereas tackling women's poverty is not only important in its own right but also of vital importance in efforts to

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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children, 'Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe', Brussels, 2014, p.5

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children, 'Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe', Brussels, 2014, p. 5.

reduce child poverty;

- L. whereas there is growing inequality between countries within the EU; whereas it is alarming that the percentage of children who suffer from malnutrition is rising, causing the resurgence of diseases that had disappeared in the EU (e.g. rachitis); whereas it is symptomatic that, according to UNICEF<sup>1</sup>, in countries such as Estonia, Greece and Italy, the percentage of children who cannot afford to eat meat, chicken or fish two days running has doubled in dramatic fashion since 2008;
- M. whereas in its concluding observations on the latest periodic reports of some countries the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the rise in the poverty rate and/or the at-risk-of-poverty rate among children due to economic crisis, which affects their enjoyment of many of the rights enshrined in the UNCRC, in particular the rights to health, education and social protection, and encouraged authorities to ensure that budgetary lines for children are protected, and whereas the financial and economic crisis has led to a deterioration in living and working conditions and to the emergence of a new group, also referred to as ‘new to need’;
- N. whereas a favourable entrepreneurial environment stimulates the growth of employment in Member States and broadens employment opportunities for parents, who can then serve as welcome role models, especially in communities adversely affected by multi-generational poverty and exclusion;
- O. whereas single-parent families, especially families headed by single mothers, are at greater risk of poverty or social exclusion (49.8 % compared to 25.2 %), although there are large differences between countries, according to EU-SILC<sup>2</sup>, which is related to the feminisation of poverty, women’s overrepresentation in precarious work and as involuntary part-time workers, the disproportionate time spent by women in unpaid work, interruptions in women’s careers to care for children or other family members, and the pay gap between men and women;
- P. whereas child poverty can be alleviated by improving opportunities in the labour market, especially those of women, through better development of childcare;
- Q. whereas children and their parents, foster parents and caregivers must be protected from discrimination on any grounds such as sex, race, colour, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or other status, and whereas children from vulnerable population groups are more at risk of marginalisation, poverty and social exclusion, as confirmed by the latest reports by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, which highlight an increase in women, young people and families with children (especially migrant families) taken into homeless shelters; whereas large single-income families are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion, owing to deteriorating national wage policies and social protection systems as a consequence of the financial and economic crisis;

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Office of Research (2014), “Children of the Recession: The impact of the economic crisis on child well-being in rich countries”, Innocenti Report Card 12, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> ‘Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe’, Brussels 2014, p.14.

- R. whereas the effects of poverty and social exclusion on children can last a lifetime and result in intergenerational worklessness and poverty; whereas the educational gap between children from different socio-economic backgrounds has increased (in 11 countries, the provision of early childhood education and care to children between the ages of 0 and 3 reaches no more than 15 % coverage);
- S. whereas early childhood education and care have a decisive impact on the cognitive development of children, given that they develop essential capacities in the first five years and whereas access to high-quality education lays the foundations for later success in life in terms of education, well-being, employability, and social integration, and has a significant impact on self-esteem, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds ; whereas the educational gap between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds has increased; whereas working parents who do not have access to a nursery school are often forced to leave children in the care of another child, or to resort to paid and uncertified informal care networks, which jeopardises their children's safety and well-being; whereas pre-school education may play a significant role in compensating for the low socio-economic status of children under threat of poverty and constitutes a factor facilitating parents' return to the labour market<sup>1</sup>; whereas inclusive education addresses and responds to the diversity of needs of all learners through increased participation in learning, cultures and community values, and thus represents a powerful tool for combating child poverty and social exclusion;
- T. whereas local and regional authorities are at the forefront of work to tackle child poverty and exploitation and therefore have a crucial responsibility in preventing marginalisation and social exclusion, and whereas they should be provided with sufficient means by national authorities to meet these objectives, whenever appropriate;
- U. whereas spending on education, especially as regards school materials and transportation, is essentially borne by households in most countries; whereas this expenditure is one of many contributing factors in school dropouts; whereas there remain financial, administrative and other practical barriers to education for children from marginalised groups;
- V. whereas the socioeconomic environment in which children live affects the quality of time spent at school and the quality of time during school holidays, and whereas a poor level of stimulation during free time has the unwelcome effect of increasing the differences between children, especially in their education;
  
- W. whereas, in 2012, the average school-dropout rate was 13 % for the EU and over 20 % in some countries (Portugal, Spain and Malta)<sup>2</sup>;
- X. whereas, even in countries where the right to health is enshrined in law, there are children who do not have access to adequate healthcare and some children that have

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<sup>1</sup> Commission report entitled 'Study regarding funds for implementing policy regarding child poverty' 2008, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> EU-SILC (2013) EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions.

extremely limited access to services beyond emergency care, such as those of a general practitioner or dentist, particularly because of a lack of available public services; whereas children born into poverty are at greater risk of suffering chronic illnesses and having more health problems, which leads to the perpetuation of inequality;

- Y. whereas the financial problems of families contribute to increased mental health problems in parents and to instances of family breakdown, which has undeniable repercussions on the psychological and social well-being of children;
- Z. whereas the environment in which a child lives, including the pre-birth period, has a decisive influence on the development of the cognitive system, on communication and language, and on social and emotional skills, which will have an impact on health, well-being, participation in communities and learning capacities<sup>1</sup>;
- AA. whereas all children have the right to be protected from abuse, violence and neglect and whereas research has concluded that financial pressure within families, cuts in public services and an increase in poverty can lead to greater violence against children;
- AB. whereas child poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that requires a multi-dimensional response; whereas employment is one important factor, but does not always guarantee a route out of poverty for the family of the children concerned;
- AC. whereas child poverty has a high economic cost for societies, particularly as regards increased spending on social support;
- AD. whereas families living at risk of poverty are more likely to live in unsanitary and unsafe areas, and whereas 17 % of children in the EU28 still live in such conditions, with 15 countries above average; whereas the increasing number of evictions due to the inability to pay housing costs has pushed children into increasingly unstable housing conditions, which in turn has negative impacts on the child's development and life chances;
- AE. whereas, according to the 2012 Eurostat Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), energy poverty is a problem that affects all Member States; whereas one of the consequences of energy price increases is that many children live in homes without heating, and whereas this increases the number of cases of respiratory and cardiovascular disease;
- AF. whereas families with children with health problems, and likewise parents who have health problems, more often face the risk of poverty, family breakdown and difficulty in establishing themselves on the job market;
- AG. whereas the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals post-2015 agenda and its universality provide an opportunity to increase investments in children and their rights;

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<sup>1</sup> Drivers, 2014, 'Universal, quality early childhood programmes that are responsive to need promote better and more equal outcomes in childhood and later life'.

- AH. whereas migrant children are over-represented in the group at risk of poverty and there is more discrimination against them because of language barriers, and whereas the situation is worse for illegal immigrant children; whereas, with the intensification of migratory flows, there are currently a growing number of cases in which the children of immigrants remain in the country of their birth under the care of other family members or third parties, and whereas this has a negative influence on the children's development, particularly at the emotional level;
  - AI. whereas a strong policy focus on child poverty in recent years within the EU and supportive political statements by EU Heads of State have not led to significant reductions in the levels of child poverty;
  - AJ. whereas stronger financial backing should be given to food-aid programmes aimed at disadvantaged families, since a growing number of children only have access to food at school; whereas these programmes are important, but cannot be seen as a long-term solution;
  - AK. whereas environmental issues such as pollution, traffic, contaminated land and unsafe drinking water often disproportionately affect children living in poverty;
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1. Recommends that Member States make a real commitment to developing policies to fight child poverty that focus on correcting child poverty factors and increase the effectiveness, quantity, amounts and scope of the social support specifically directed at children, but also at parents who are unemployed and the phenomenon of the working poor (such as unemployment benefits and adequate minimum income) and to promote labour laws that guarantee social rights, including a statutory adequate minimum wage in accordance with national practices and collective agreements, which will provide greater security to families and fight precarious employment, while promoting work with adequate social rights;
  2. Calls for monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of this support, in order to adapt policies for combating poverty, exclusion and dropping out of school to existing social equality requirements; urges the Member States to develop and apply diverse evidence-gathering processes appropriate to each stage of intervention;
  3. Recommends that the Commission establish with Member States a roadmap for the implementation of the three-pillar approach taken in the Commission recommendation 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage' in terms of access to resources, services and children's participation; considers that, in order to achieve better results with the three-pillar approach, it could be useful to develop precise and specific indicators of the level of child poverty and the areas more affected by this phenomenon; calls on the Member States to effectively integrate relevant aspects of the Social Investment Package and the aforementioned Commission recommendation into their annual National Reform Programmes and National Social Reports in a comprehensive way and calls on the Commission to set a Europe 2020 sub-target on reducing child poverty and social exclusion, to make the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion visible and explicit at all stages of the European Semester, to include in each Annual Growth Survey a specific section with the binding target on fighting child

poverty and promoting children's well-being, and to incorporate an explicit child and youth focus into the 'European Semester'; stresses that the reduction of child poverty by investing in children should be proposed as a core priority for the 2016 Annual Growth Survey, and as a key means of progressing on the poverty target; calls on the Commission to ensure annual monitoring and reporting by Member States on the implementation of the Commission recommendation through the roadmap and to use the European Social Fund to implement the Commission recommendation and conduct an assessment of the effects on poverty of reforms proposed within National Reform Programmes;

4. Calls on the Member States to also address, in their efforts to combat child poverty, the position of women taking care of children and family members with special needs and disabilities;
5. Recommends that the Member States, when using European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) resources and developing social policies, should devote greater attention to protecting families (especially single-parent families) with children with health problems against poverty;
6. Reiterates the importance of preventive public policies investing in sensible child welfare policies that support the development of empowered individuals, capable of integrating in society and into the labour market, rather than focusing on the consequences of their social exclusion and poverty;
7. Considers that, without neglecting the need to support children who are poor, have dropped out of school or are socially excluded, policies supporting children and young people should be strongly marked by prevention, including long-term strategies for combating social inequality;
8. Recommends that the Member States implement or enhance universal welfare benefits targeting children, such as the provision of subsidised or free meals for children, especially for disadvantaged and poor children, in order to ensure their healthy development; calls on the Member States to adopt active employment measures as part of comprehensive strategies and policies to support parents' access to good-quality employment and adequate income, and access to high-quality public services (particularly childcare, education, health, housing, and leisure activities) facilitating the alignment of professional life with family life, and to strengthen the participation of children and their families in the development, implementation and monitoring of these policies; stresses that universal solutions should be coupled with targeted measures to support the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of children and adolescents; regrets the growing tendency of Member State governments to move away from universal support policies towards more means-tested support, as evidence shows that universal support policies offer better protection against child poverty<sup>1</sup>;
9. Encourages the Member States and the Commission to agree on EU standards or establish an agreed methodology for determining the cost of raising a child and for defining adequate resources to prevent and combat child poverty;

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<sup>1</sup> (Based on Eurofound research)

10. Calls on the Commission to refrain from recommending reformulations and cuts in the public services of Member States, from promoting flexible labour relations and the privatisation of public services, which have led unequivocally to the weakening of the social rights of children;
11. Asks the Commission to emphasise the need for investment in free, public education by pinpointing specific education methods for the most vulnerable social groups, such as immigrants or people with disabilities of various kinds; considers that education can be a key priority in ensuring that children acquire the skills which will enable them to access skilled, well-paid jobs, enabling them to build their own way out of poverty;
12. Recalls that tackling child poverty requires the adoption of a life-cycle approach, including breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty risks, that reflects the different needs of early childhood, primary childhood and adolescence, applying a whole-child oriented approach by measuring the number of deprivations each child experiences simultaneously, thereby identifying those most deprived, and measuring not only monetary poverty but also multidimensional deprivations;
13. Recommends that all children have access to good quality services at this crucial stage in their development; considers that health, education, parenting and family support, housing and protection are key services which are most often delivered by local and regional authorities;
14. Urges the Member States to adopt, implement and monitor plans for alleviating multi-dimensional child poverty, putting the focus on the intrinsic rights of children and setting targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion, with an explicit focus on and prioritisation of those children living at the highest risk of poverty; recalls the importance of the Member States providing for at least pre-crisis levels of real-term expenditure on social protection, health, education and social housing for the benefit of the most disadvantaged children;
15. Urges the Member States to implement plans to alleviate the sense of social exclusion felt by children with learning difficulties and to establish more efficient education modules which support their learning methods;
16. Calls on the Member States to recognise that child poverty and social exclusion are key barriers to overcome if they are to achieve their Europe 2020 targets in relation to employment rates, investment in research, development, energy and sustainable development;
17. Urges the Member States to devote greater attention to the creation and availability of a suitable out-of-school environment in which children can spend their time in a meaningful and stimulating way outside school hours and during school holidays, and to devote greater attention to the availability of basic healthcare for children in deprived areas and in remote and inaccessible regions;
18. Calls on the Member States to avoid ghettoisation of children experiencing poverty and social exclusion, by introducing minimum standards for children's housing, taking into account the best interests of the child, and by guaranteeing households an appropriate

home that meets their needs and ensures their well-being, privacy and quality of life, thereby contributing to the achievement of social justice and cohesion and the combating of social exclusion and poverty;

19. Calls for the Commission and Parliament to take the opportunity provided by the mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework to make better use of the European Social Fund, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived and the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation and to check whether children are a priority in the programming and implementation of regional and cohesion policies, with particular regard to the obligation to gradually eliminate large residential institutions (enforceable since 2014), in order to reinforce adoptive and foster-parent status so that orphans and disadvantaged children can actually grow up in a family or a family-type environment; also urges the Commission to create indicators to analyse child poverty;
20. Urges the Commission and the Member States to consider whether food-based strategies, such as dietary diversification and food fortification, as well as nutrition education, public health and food safety measures, and finally supplementation, need to be addressed for particular groups of the population in order to prevent the negative effects of malnutrition or undernutrition on the health of children;
21. Calls on the Commission to bear in mind the proposals contained in the European Economic and Social Committee's opinion entitled 'For coordinated European measures to prevent and combat energy poverty', and to encourage the urgent adoption of a European energy security and solidarity commitment and, within this framework, the setting-up of a European poverty observatory and a European fund with the specific aim of eradicating energy poverty;
22. Recommends that Member States' national budgets contain visible, transparent, participatory and accountable provisions for appropriations and costs to combat child poverty and to fulfil their duty to protect children, including through an increase in public spending with a view to attaining such objectives; calls on the Member States to make maximum use of the European Structural and Investment Funds, in particular the European Social Fund, in order to implement all three pillars of the Investing in Children recommendation';
23. Recommends that the Commission develop guidelines to support the participation of children in the policy-making process, putting in place mechanisms which promote and ensure children's participation in decision making that affects their lives, and which enable and encourage children to express informed views, ensuring that those views are given due weight and are reflected in the main decisions affecting them;
24. Recommends that the Commission and the Member States set targets for reducing child poverty and social exclusion;
25. Urges the Member States to put in place, where necessary, cooperation agreements with entities and institutions that promote the education, cultural or sports training, and integration of children, and that combat child poverty; recommends, however, that the Member States ensure the supervision, quality, sustainability and relevance of this support, and of its actual results;

26. Calls on the Member States to implement specific legislation to protect and increase maternity and paternity rights, including through the implementation of efficient instruments to ensure a balance between work and family, and to safeguard the return to work for women after pregnancy and maternity leave, and support for single-parent families; stresses, furthermore, that reinforcing legislation on paternity leave gives an important boost to combating gender and pay discrimination at work; urges the Member States to ensure that unequal treatment and harassment of employees cannot be justified by employers by reference to pregnancy, the rearing of children or family-related matters;
27. Recommends that the Member States develop proactive, universal and integrated social policies that prevent poverty and the removal of children from their family environment; calls on the Member States to ensure that the institutionalisation of children and young people is used only as a last resort, under exceptional circumstances, and to use the EU structural funds and the European Fund for Strategic Investments to support the transition from institutional to family and community-based services;
28. Recommends that the Member States move away from institutional care in favour of stable foster care systems which better prepare children and young people for an independent life, continued learning or work;
29. Recommends that the Member States develop and implement integrated child protection systems to protect children against violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect in such a way as to ensure that all duty-bearers and system components work together across sectors and agencies sharing responsibilities to form a protective and empowering environment for all children;
30. Urges the Member States to conduct policies that facilitate the creation and maintenance of decent workplaces and develop systems for training, improving qualifications and amenities such as teleworking or flexitime facilitating parents' entry or return to the labour market following a break in their professional career;
31. Calls on EU institutions, EU agencies, Member State authorities and other stakeholders to develop clear roles, responsibilities, regular dialogue and procedures when children are in need of protection in cross-border situations;
32. Recommends that the Member States guarantee all children access to free, inclusive and quality public education at all ages, including early childhood education and care, and formal and non-formal education, promoting their emotional, social, cognitive and physical development, establish appropriate teacher-student ratios and promote social mix in education, in order to safeguard the safety and well-being of children, ensure that all children can benefit from inclusive high-quality education and thus maximise the education systems' impact on equal opportunities and breaking the cycle of poverty;
33. Urges the Member States to increase the quality of educational services offered, by applying an individual approach and promoting cooperation among teachers, social workers and parents in order to prevent children and young persons from putting a stop to their education;

34. Calls on the Member States to pay particular attention to developing affordable and accessible early childhood education and care (ECEC), regarding it as a social investment aimed at addressing inequality and challenges faced, in particular, by children from disadvantaged families, and also to raise parents' awareness of the benefits of active participation in ECEC programmes;
35. Calls on the Member States to promote inclusive schooling, which should involve not just increasing the number of special education teachers, but also integrating children with special educational needs into normal classes;
36. Urges the Member States to provide universal and equal access to crèches and pre-schools for children from all social groups;
37. Calls on the Member States to promote full school engagement of all children by providing free and basic school materials, nutritious school meals and the necessary school transportation for children in poverty or at risk of poverty, to increase the effectiveness of present public investments in the sector and combat the intergenerational transmission of poverty more effectively;
38. Urges the Member States to guarantee universal, public, free and quality health care with regard to prevention, immunisation programmes and primary care, access to diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation, and to provide speech and psychological therapies for children, guaranteeing women the right to sexual and reproductive health by ensuring health care for babies, maternity care and home visits in the pre- and post-natal care period, particularly in the case of premature birth, access to family doctors, nurses, dentists, family counselling services and mental health specialists for all children and their families; calls on the Member States and the Commission to integrate these aspects into national and EU public health strategies;
39. Recommends that the Member States provide the necessary support to ensure the right to culture, sport and leisure, access to open space and a healthy environment for all children, with a focus on ensuring equal access and quality for children in poverty, children in remote areas, children with disabilities, children belonging to national or ethnic, religious, linguistic and migrant minorities, children moving within the EU regardless of their nationality and children left behind; recalls the right to play, as laid down in the UNCRC;
40. Emphasises the need for enhanced protection of children experiencing poverty and social exclusion from domestic violence;
41. Calls on the Member States, particularly those where social inequalities are greater, to strengthen social rights and access to services and social protection, that the state must guarantee, increasing the number of employees and professionals in social security services working with and for children and their families, and increasing medical, psychological and social care, directing it at those most in need, in particular at children, in line with an early intervention approach;
42. Recommends that the Member States put in place mechanisms that promote and ensure children's participation in decision making that affects their lives and enable and

encourage children to express informed views, ensuring that those views are given due weight and are reflected in the main decisions affecting them;

43. Recognises the role of civil society, including children's rights and anti-poverty organisations, in ensuring EU policy coherence, and calls for strengthened civil dialogue on preventing and tackling child poverty in the Member States;
44. Urges the Commission to make the early school leaving rate and tackling child poverty an explicit priority in the European Semester and Europe 2020 governance and to include a specific indicator on children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union;
45. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to participate actively in combating the trafficking of children for any form of exploitation, including work, forced marriage, illegal adoption, illegal activities and sexual exploitation;
46. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to support the functioning of European and transnational networks to combat child and youth poverty and exclusion; warns that integrating the outermost regions and the most disadvantaged regions into these networks and institutions should be particularly supported;
47. Considers the right to free and universal education, health and social security systems as basic conditions for combating poverty, in particular among children; bearing in mind this objective, calls on the Commission and the Member States, in view of the weakening of public services, to introduce a child guarantee with its specific fund so that every child in poverty can have access to free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition, as part of a European integrated plan to combat child poverty including both the Child Guarantee and programmes offering support and opportunities for the parents to come out of social exclusion situations and to integrate the labour market;
48. Calls on the Member States to support, through their municipalities, local centres for supporting children and their families, particularly in the communities and/or areas most affected by the issue of child poverty, which provide not just for legal aid and/or advice, parental advice and school support, but also for education and guidance on a healthy lifestyle and on safe internet use, among other things;
49. Recommends that the Commission and the Member States develop statistical methods that integrate multidimensional indicators, disaggregated by age, gender and particular disadvantaged groups , in measuring poverty, social exclusion, inequalities, discrimination and child well-being (parents' income, access to high-quality public services, participation in social and cultural activities, access to adequate formal and informal education services, exposure to physical risk, safety, a stable family environment, and the level of life satisfaction), in order to inform evidence-based policy development and take into account the limitations of relative poverty measurements and the work of the UNDP, UNICEF, the OECD and the Indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee, going beyond the AROPE (at risk of poverty and/or exclusion) indicators; invites the Commission and the Member States to develop responses based on a comprehensive approach and to make full use of data collected under initiatives

such as the Multi-Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) developed by UNICEF ; stresses that further indicators should be developed to improve the assessment of the quality of services, outcomes and access to services, e.g. in relation to the socio-economic status and background of parents (migrant or minority), gender, disability and geographical aspects;

50. Invites the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions to draw up opinions on investing in children;
51. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Member States.

## **EXPLANATORY STATEMENT**

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children should be guaranteed the right to education, health services, housing, protection, to participate in decisions that affect them, leisure and free time, a balanced diet and to be raised within a family. However, within the EU, the Convention is far from being satisfied.

In fact, all reports point to a rise in child poverty in Europe. Between 2008 and 2012, the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe (EU27+Norway, Iceland and Switzerland) rose by almost one million, increasing by half a million between 2011 and 2012 alone<sup>1</sup>; the risk of poverty or social exclusion increased between 2008 and 2012 from 26.5% to 28% (20.8% of children lived in families with disposable incomes below 60% of the national average, 9% lived in households with very low work intensity and 11.8% in homes with material deprivation.); in 2013, according to Eurostat data from 2013, 26.5 million children in EU28 were at risk of poverty and social exclusion. However, when considering UNICEF data, which combines data from Eurostat with the OECD, it was found that, between 2008 and 2013, 1.6 million children were living in severe material deprivation in 30 countries in Europe<sup>2</sup>.

It is alarming that the percentage of children living in absolute and long-term poverty (over 3 years) is increasing and that in countries such as Estonia, Greece and Italy, the percentage of children who cannot eat meat, chicken or fish two days running has doubled since 2008.

Child poverty is growing along with the increase in social inequalities and it is known that countries with higher levels of social inequality are also more likely to have high levels of poverty and child social exclusion. The ‘poverty gap’, which measures the distance between the poverty line and the income of people living below it, has increased, which indicates that poverty has intensified. In the EU27, since 2008 the percentage of children in poverty whose parents have a lower level of education increased from 55.3% to 61%, and increased by only 0.5% for children with parents who have a higher education<sup>3</sup>. It is also known that in the EU, children born in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods or regions, whose parents have low levels of education and employment or whose parents are migrants, are more likely to have limited access to health services and education, a trend that has intensified since 2008, and that single parents, especially families headed by single mothers, are at greater risk of poverty or social exclusion (49.8% compared to 25.2%), which is aggravated when the parent is unemployed.

Social inequalities reproduce disadvantage across generations and the negative effects of poverty and social exclusion on children can last a lifetime, as it is early in life that they form cognitive and socio-economic skills, which means that the negative policy measures taken today will have irreversible negative impacts on the lives of these people and on society.

The factors that most influence child poverty are wealth redistribution policies and labour

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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children, ‘Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe’, Brussels, 2014, p.5

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF Office of Research (2014), ‘Children of the Recession: The impact of the economic crisis on child well-being in rich countries’, Innocenti Report Card 12, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, p.3

<sup>3</sup> Save the Children, ‘Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe’, Brussels, 2014, p.18

policy<sup>1</sup>, particularly salary levels and social rights; however, in several countries, governments, following guidelines from EU institutions, have reduced social support to children and families. For example, in Portugal, between 2010 and 2013, and coinciding with the period of the Troika programme, nearly one million children stopped receiving child benefit and, between 2010 and 2012, 46,342 families were no longer entitled to income support supplement. It is no coincidence that countries with fewer children in poverty (the Nordic countries, Austria, Slovenia and the Netherlands) are those with higher social policies in terms of access to housing, unemployment benefit, support for early childhood and access to education, while in countries that invest less in these measures - such as Greece, Italy, Portugal, Poland and Spain - child poverty levels are higher.<sup>2</sup>

There is, therefore, consensus among the various organisations that the main cause of increased child poverty is the so-called austerity measures (a significant reduction of social support to children and families, rising unemployment, the spread of precarious employment and an increase in the tax burden). UNICEF states that budget cuts, particularly in the Mediterranean countries, have increased inequality and helped worsen the living conditions of children; these policies therefore violate the rights of children and constitute a violation of international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Poverty is multidimensional and must be understood not only as a failure to cover the basic needs of children, such as food, clothing and housing, but also lack of access to education and quality health services and the inability to participate in sports, cultural and other leisure activities. On the other hand, the needs that children experience are directly related to the social situation of families and therefore solving children's problems means, largely, solving family problems.

We consider it essential that Member States increase in quantity, amount, scope and effectiveness the support and social rights specifically directed to children but also to parents (such as unemployment benefits or increased maternity and paternity rights) and to promote labour laws which guarantee social rights and security to families, and fight precarious employment, illegal recruitment and the exploitation of workers, implementing or strengthening universal welfare benefits targeting children as a child's intrinsic right. It is important that the European Commission acts consistently with the recommendations that it adopted on 20 February, 2013<sup>3</sup>, refraining from recommending reformulations and cuts in the public services of Member States, and proposing instead a more cohesive policy of increasing and redistributing EU funds. To this end, it is also imperative to repeal Economic Governance and the Budget Treaty. It is also important that Member States and the European Commission consider children as a priority in the programming and implementation of regional and cohesion policies, using the European Social Fund for measures to reduce child poverty and establish enforcement targets and objectives that should have regular monitoring. We also

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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children, 'Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe', Brussels, 2014, p.5

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children, 'Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe', Brussels, 2014, p.12 (based on the European Commission's 'Thematic study on policy measures concerning child poverty', 2008 and the Social Protection Committee's Tackling and Preventing Child Poverty, 2012

<sup>3</sup> 'Invest in children to break the vicious circle of inequality'

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P8-TA-2014-0070-def\\_1\\_3](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P8-TA-2014-0070-def_1_3) (C(2013)778), 2013

recommend to the Member States that national budgets contain visible and transparent provisions for expenditure to combat child poverty and to fulfil the duty to protect children by implementing and monitoring plans to reduce child poverty, putting the focus on the intrinsic rights of children, setting targets for reducing poverty and child social exclusion.

The opportunity provided by the mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework should be used by the European Commission and the European Parliament to increase appropriations from the European Social Fund and the Food Aid Program for the most disadvantaged, transferring the amounts allocated, for example, for foreign security policy to combating poverty and social exclusion. It is also important that the European Commission put into practice the European Minimum Income, as advocated by Parliament in the 2010 resolution on the role of minimum income in combating poverty and promoting an inclusive society in Europe (2010/2039(INI)).

The early years, before compulsory education, are crucial to the development of children, since it is in these years that they develop fundamental skills; access to quality education has important impacts on self-esteem, the ability to participate in social life and on quality of health. However, the EU average educational provision to children aged between 0 and 3 is around 30%<sup>1</sup> and in 11 countries (Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Austria, Croatia and Latvia) does not reach 15% coverage, with children from the poorest families having less access to childcare.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, school drop-out rates in the EU in 2012 averaged 13%, and there are countries where this rate went beyond 20% (Portugal, Spain and Malta)<sup>3</sup>. We therefore recommend that Member States guarantee all children access to free, quality public education at all ages, including early childhood, and establish appropriate teacher-student ratios; we also recommend that Member States provide free school materials and school transportation during school hours;

Children born in poverty have a higher risk of chronic diseases and have more health problems. Even in countries where the right to health is enshrined in law, there are many children who do not have access to a family doctor or dentist, for lack of public services, or medicines, or high costs; infant mortality levels are also much higher in families from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Equally, the economic problems of families have had an effect on the growth of mental health problems among parents and the rise of family breakdown, which has an undeniable impact on children's psychological and social well-being;

It is shameful that in countries such as Portugal more resources are used for interest payments on the public debt than for the public health service. We recommend Member States to guarantee universal, public, free and quality health care with regard to prevention and primary care, access to diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation, guaranteeing women the right to sexual and reproductive health by ensuring health care for babies, maternity care in the pre- and post-natal care period, particularly in the case of premature birth, access to family doctors, dentists and mental health specialists for all children, and integrate these aspects into national and the EU public health strategies;

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<sup>1</sup> EU-SILC (2013) European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions

<sup>2</sup> Social Protection Committee (2012), Tackling and Preventing Child Poverty

<sup>3</sup> EU-SILC (2013) European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions

It should be noted that 11% of children live in families that spend more than 40% of their disposable income on housing costs (in Greece this figure is 38%) and the latest reports from the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless state that accommodation for the homeless is increasingly occupied by women, young people and families with children, with migrant children being over-represented. We call on Member States to eliminate the possibility of seizure and foreclosure on houses when families do not have enough income to guarantee their livelihood, or on tax foreclosure processes.

We also call on Member States to provide the necessary subsidies to guarantee the right to culture, sport and leisure for all children, with a focus on children in poverty, children in remote areas, children with disabilities, and migrants; in order to protect children from abuse, violence and neglect, it is important to strengthen the social rights that the state must guarantee, increasing the number of employees and specialists in social services, to increase the medical, psychological and social care of young people.

## **RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE**

<b>Date adopted</b>	13.10.2015
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: -: 0:
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Laura Agea, Guillaume Balas, Tiziana Beghin, Brando Benifei, Mara Bizzotto, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Enrique Calvet Chambon, David Casa, Ole Christensen, Jane Collins, Arne Gericke, Marian Harkin, Agnes Jongerius, Rina Ronja Kari, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, Kostadinka Kuneva, Jean Lambert, Jérôme Lavrilleux, Patrick Le Hyaric, Verónica Lope Fontagné, Javi López, Thomas Mann, Dominique Martin, Anthea McIntyre, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Emilian Pavel, Terry Reintke, Sofia Ribeiro, Maria João Rodrigues, Claude Rolin, Anne Sander, Siôn Simon, Jutta Steinruck, Romana Tomc, Yana Toom, Ulrike Trebesius, Ulla Tørnæs, Marita Ulvskog, Renate Weber, Tatjana Ždanoka, Jana Žitňanská, Inês Cristina Zuber
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Maria Arena, Georges Bach, Dieter-Lebrecht Koch, Joachim Schuster, Csaba Sógor, Michaela Šojdrová, Neoklis Sylkiotis, Tom Vandenkendelaere