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The feminisation of poverty

Report
Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
Rapporteur: Ms Hermine NAGHDALYAN, Armenia, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Summary

The “feminisation of poverty” means that women have a higher incidence of poverty than men, that their poverty is more severe than that of men and that poverty among women is on the increase.

The Assembly considers that preventing and eradicating women’s poverty is an important part of the fundamental principle of social solidarity.

Gender inequality hinders poverty reduction and endangers the prospects of economic and human development. The Assembly thus invites Council of Europe member states to regard gender equality not only as a condition for social justice but also as a condition for the promotion of development.

It therefore calls on them to take action to combat the poverty - and pauperisation – of women. It urges them to adopt a gender-specific perspective as a key component of all policies and national programmes to eradicate poverty and combat social exclusion, in order to remedy and prevent the risk of poverty among women.

In particular, it calls on them to reinforce women’s labour market participation and to promote a policy of equality.

It emphasises the need for member states to devise measures and develop resources to combat chronic poverty and social exclusion effectively, for example introducing a minimum retirement pension for persons over the age of sixty and implementing targeted healthcare projects. It also calls on the member states to promote the enlargement of women’s opportunities through education.

Finally, it recommends that the Committee of Ministers initiate a study of the feminisation of poverty.

Draft resolution

1. The “feminisation of poverty” means that women have a higher incidence of poverty than men, that their poverty is more severe than that of men and that poverty among women is on the increase. Preventing and reducing women’s poverty, if not eradicating it, is an important part of the fundamental principle of social solidarity to which the world is committed.

2. Poverty can be described as the impossibility of meeting a person’s minimum biological, social, spiritual and cultural requirements. The Assembly notes that in this regard women are the most vulnerable group of the population. Women may face difficult situations in which they are particularly exposed to poverty, for instance when they are young and pregnant or lacking a vocational qualification, are divorced or at retirement age, when their contribution in terms of housework is not recognised. The risk and possibility for households led by women to be in poverty are by one third greater than for other households. In fact, large families and single mothers appear to be in the same, and in many cases, in a worse situation.

3. This is the basis for the phenomenon called “the feminisation of poverty”, by which is meant the prevalence of the number of women and children in the total number of poor people. This assessment basically refers to material (income or property) poverty. However, from the perspective of human poverty, namely the enlargement of opportunities or freedom of choice, the gender inequality is deeper.

4. While identifying poverty as a multi-dimensional phenomenon the Assembly finds that gender inequality is one of the factors at the very roots of poverty. There are three groups of problems:

4.1. the gender division of labour, which results in highly paid jobs basically for men and lower paid ones for women;

4.2. inequality in resource access and disposal;

4.3. women’s limited powers in the defence of their interests, which is conditioned by economic, legal, social, cultural and other factors.

5. Gender inequality hinders poverty reduction and endangers the prospects of economic and human development. The Assembly thus invites Council of Europe member states to regard gender equality not only as a condition for social justice but also as a condition for the promotion of development.

6. The results of the time-use pilot study conducted in 2004 in some countries show that women in developing countries spend more time on housework than men. Consequently, a significant gender difference appears with respect to the compatibility of profitable employment and personal life. Such a difference exists also in other countries, including the developed ones, however on a smaller scale.

7. Unemployment can be assessed similarly. In developing countries the level of unemployment among women significantly exceeds the level of unemployment among men. The gender character of the problem of unemployment is related to age and marital status. While the chances of finding a job for unmarried young men and girls are almost the same, women in the 50-54 age-group are more likely to become unemployed and, consequently, have a higher risk of poverty.

8. Children growing up in poverty are also at risk of being underfed, hence physically underdeveloped, and of being undereducated – which, again, reduces their chances of escaping poverty in later life. Children’s poverty includes not only material difficulties but also the lost opportunities with respect to the development of their human capital, so the transmission of poverty from generation to generation becomes almost inevitable.

9. The Assembly draws attention to the consequences of extreme poverty, which can lead to even worse situations of violence, prostitution and human trafficking.

10. The Assembly thus attaches great importance to the elimination of poverty and not only its reduction, i.e. the package of passive state policy measures of social assistance, family benefits and

social protection. It calls on the governments of member states to proceed from the goals of human development and the establishment of social justice, and thus to identify the essence and tasks of policies aimed at the elimination of poverty based on the conceptual approaches of poverty eradication and on earmarking priorities and guidelines. A principled provision should be set forth in conceptual approaches: the elimination of poverty should be considered an issue of development and not of survival. The afore-mentioned approach, though valid for all countries, is of primary importance for developing countries and countries in transition.

11. The Assembly believes that it is necessary to adopt a gender-specific perspective as a key component of all policies and national programmes to eradicate poverty and combat social exclusion, in order to remedy and prevent the risk of poverty among women.

12. The enlargement of employment is, indeed, the socially more accepted and economically efficient way to overcome poverty. In this respect, the key problems for the actual economic situation of women include discrimination against women in the labour market, insufficient employment opportunities for women and insufficient social security for working women.

13. The Assembly thus calls on Council of Europe member states to:

13.1. assess gender inequality in the formal labour market and reveal its causes;

13.2. consider developing methods of influencing the labour market (if need be through positive discrimination, gender quotas or other methods) aimed at the practical application of the principle of equality of opportunities;

13.3. observe non-formal labour market parameters, including gender, the underestimation of which casts doubt on the level of substantiation of economic and social development projects;

13.4. promote the development of national craftsmanship, home industry and small businesses through a privileged loan and tax policy, in particular in rural areas;

13.5. immediately apply the principle of "equal pay for work of equal value";

13.6. take the necessary measures to promote the reconciliation of work and private life, in order to enable women who so wish to pursue their careers or work full-time;

13.7. make employers aware of the need to provide career development opportunities for all employees irrespective of their sex;

13.8. maintain the principle of "balanced representation" for all civil service appointments, if need be by applying positive discrimination measures;

13.9. help women to enter or re-enter the labour market;

13.10. offer vocational training courses at all stages in life to enable women who lack the respective qualification to find a job;

13.11. support and encourage employers and businesses which promote women's employment, provide flexible working schemes, give access to childcare facilities, etc.;

13.12. support the creation of a qualification and training system for women entrepreneurs, contribute to the shaping of a positive image of women's entrepreneurship among the public and provide state funding for the development of women's entrepreneurship.

14. The Assembly recommends that Council of Europe member states apply the following measures with a view to improving social support:

14.1. assess the impact of social transfers according to the sex of the beneficiaries and, if need be, redress the balance between the benefits;

- 14.2. significantly increase the allowances for the birth and care of children and the duration of partially-paid leave;
 - 14.3. set up childcare centres (e.g. kindergartens with flexible schemes) and other social services;
 - 14.4. establish paid leave for taking care of sick children;
 - 14.5. involve carers in social service projects for the elderly and disabled at home;
 - 14.6. introduce allowances and other privileges (e.g. paid leave) for the care of the elderly and other able-bodied family members;
 - 14.7. involve a child poverty elimination component in poverty elimination national programmes, which, in particular, will include a considerable increase of the amount allocated to minors in the family allowance system;
 - 14.8. implement training schemes for overcoming stressful situations, as well as establish socio-psychological services (e.g. hot lines) both for women and men.
15. The Assembly considers that the old-age pension system is crucial for poverty reduction both in individual families and at the level of the public at large and thus recommends that member states:
- 15.1. ensure that the scope and conditions of entitlement to old-age pension schemes enable women to have sufficient retirement pensions, especially by compensating for career breaks and part-time work due to childcare and the care of elderly or dependent persons;
 - 15.2. introduce a minimum retirement pension for persons over the age of 60 who have not paid contributions or not enough contributions to provide them with a decent standard of living, to which should be added a pension supplement based on the income earned during their period of employment;
 - 15.3. provide social security cover for women caring for children or dependent persons or who have a modest retirement pension;
 - 15.4. eliminate sanctions and restrictions which are applied by many pension schemes towards employees with irregular working activity (frequent change of work, change of professional occupation, transfer from one geographical place to another), as well as in the so-called "flexible jobs" (part-time, or temporary or agency, domestic or distance work);
 - 15.5. introduce in pension schemes the right to a pension in the event of the loss of the breadwinner, for divorced women and their children, as well as for women who have not registered their marriage;
 - 15.6. not to restrict the eligibility for insurance in the retirement pension system in the event of a temporary break in career due to child birth and care to six years only;
 - 15.7. pass the pension cumulative component right to the spouse by inheritance; the transfer of the pension cumulative component right can also be done by converting the accumulated resources of the individual pension accounts of spouses into a "joint" annuity.
16. The Assembly considers that poor health can be both a consequence of and a reason for poverty. The poor people are in the vortex of a vicious circle: because of poverty they lack means to make contributions (medical services, food, clean water, sufficient sanitary and hygienic conditions, which are the prerequisites of good health) to preserve their health. This results in a reduced capacity for work and the individual becomes poorer. Hence the preservation of human health is an important component of poverty reduction and of the increase in living standards, and in this field an efficient purposeful policy should be pursued.
17. The Assembly thus calls on member states to:

17.1. act separately, according to “poverty” groups and geographical areas, in identifying the healthcare goals of the population linking them with “poverty maps” and implement targeted healthcare projects;

17.2. include representatives of the most vulnerable groups in the formulation of the basic services package provided by the state, focusing on social diseases (tuberculosis, infectious and sexually transmitted diseases), provision of medical services aimed at the protection of maternal and child health, and services of demographic significance (reproductive health);

17.3. encourage a more rational distribution of medical personnel in order to increase access to medical aid; in particular member states should:

17.3.1. introduce general practitioners' practices in rural areas as a priority;

17.3.2. establish attractive conditions for new graduates to work in rural areas;

17.3.3. take more active measures to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, especially educational projects aimed at young people.

18. Quality education is one of the most important factors in mitigating poverty and inequality. Education for women greatly increases their opportunities and living standards. The Assembly sees a direct link between the level of education of women and the socio-economic conditions of their life, since a low level of education for future generations means lost opportunities. The Assembly thus calls on the member states to promote the enlargement of women's opportunities through education, given the boomerang effect of women's education on healthcare and the upbringing of future generations.

B. Draft recommendation

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution No.... (2006) on the feminisation of poverty.
2. It believes that the Council of Europe has a fundamental role to play in ensuring social cohesion and combating poverty among women.
3. It therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers take account of gender in its social cohesion policies and co-operation programmes with Council of Europe member states, placing the accent on eradicating poverty among women.
4. It also recommends that the Committee of Ministers instruct the relevant intergovernmental committees to:
 - 4.1 initiate a study of the feminisation of poverty in order to define gender-specific poverty indicators taking account of women's needs and of income-sharing between women and men, which will serve as common reference points for the Council of Europe member states and enable them to determine the reasons why women are over-represented among the poor and suffer from more acute poverty; and to co-operate with the European Union to achieve this aim, in particular as regards statistics;
 - 4.2 propose practical ways of including gender issues in poverty reduction strategies;
 - 4.3 design a public and media awareness programme focusing on the fact that men as well as women should assume responsibility for children and other dependents.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Hermine Naghdalyan, Rapporteur

I. Introduction

1. When feminisation of poverty is mentioned, undoubtedly the first image that comes to mind is of rural women, principally in the developing countries and on the African, South American or Asian continents. Sadly, it must be acknowledged that women in Europe are not immune to this problem either. For the past decade there has been growing concern over the slowness and unevenness of the poverty alleviation processes, and what is perceived as the feminisation of poverty. Although the aggregate figures for poverty incidence are not broken down according to gender, women irrefutably represent a larger proportion than men of the population living in poverty. Consequently, the values of equality and human rights upheld by the Council of Europe prompt its Parliamentary Assembly to concern itself with this fundamental question of social cohesion.

2. Following the introductory statement by Ms Vermot-Mangold, the previous rapporteur, the committee held a most instructive hearing¹ in Paris on 10 March 2006. The rapporteur, who has taken up some of the pertinent proposals made at the hearing, suggests referring to the proceedings.

3. She proposes to look at the concept (I) and the factors leading to this situation (II) before suggesting appropriate solutions to the existing problems (III).

II. Finding a definition of the feminisation of poverty

4. This subject area, whose outlines are not clearly predetermined, raises manifold questions on closer scrutiny: What does the term “poverty” refer to? Which women are concerned? What of the poverty threshold? What are the poverty indicators for women specifically?

5. The term “feminisation of poverty” was apparently coined in the USA in the 1970s in the debate about single mothers, particularly in the Afro-American community. Initially it was associated with the growing number of women who were heads of families; then in the 1980s it began to be used with reference to the increasing recruitment of women to poorly paid jobs. Currently the term denotes that women have a higher incidence of poverty than men; that their poverty is more severe than that of men; and that poverty among women is on the increase².

6. In practical terms, women’s and men’s different levels of risk in relation to poverty cannot be interpreted solely with reference to the average risk of poverty in a given country. Women in the European Union face a much higher at-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers than men, except in a small number of countries such as Poland (the only country where men are more at risk), Latvia, Malta, Portugal, the Slovak Republic and Romania – where the risk is identical for both sexes. In countries where women are more at risk, the difference between the sexes varies from 5.3% in Italy to more than 15% in nine countries: the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Austria, Slovenia, Sweden and Bulgaria. In terms of development, this group of countries is very mixed, making it impossible to trace any link between levels of development and poverty levels³.

7. Women are among the poorest in the Council of Europe member states. Moreover, the gap between women and men trapped in the poverty cycle continues to widen. This trend towards an increase in poverty marks a reversal in terms of the movement in support of equal opportunities for women and men. For example, women are again encountering more difficulties in finding a decent job. As Ms Hammer⁴ pointed out, there is a sort of “black hole” even in the poorest families. Men spend money on themselves, while women tend to see to it that the children have the basic minimum, to the detriment of their own needs. The ensuing resentment among women is due to the fact that they do not control their own lives because they do not have enough to live on. Clearly, household income is unequally shared, even among the poorest, to the disadvantage of women. To palliate this injustice, the rapporteur proposes that social security benefits for maintenance and family expenditure be paid to women, who will share out the income received, as in Portugal. Ms Ferreira reports that

¹ The minutes of the hearing on the feminisation of poverty are available on request from the Secretariat of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men under the reference AS/Ega(2006)PV3 Addendum I.

² See minutes, statement by Ms Ferreira, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See minutes, p. 2.

paying the minimum state income allowance to women has influenced family dynamics in a way that is a direct result of policy⁵.

8. Ms Hammer says that the concept of poverty needs to include the subjective experience of deprivation created by poverty. She notes that women experience poverty to a greater extent. The way in which money is spent is influenced by whether or not a woman is in employment. Women who work full time have greater control over money within the family. In families where the woman has no income, the male partner is three times more likely to control expenditure⁶.

9. The European Parliament has noted that poverty takes a variety of forms, including the lack of sufficient income and productive resources to earn one's living on a sustainable basis, hunger and malnutrition, poor health, limited or non-existent access to education and other basic services, growing mortality due to illness, homelessness or inappropriate housing, an unsafe environment, and social discrimination and exclusion. It emphasises that poverty is also distinguished by non-participation in decision-making processes and in civic, social and cultural affairs⁷.

10. The rapporteur states her preference for a relative approach to poverty, as defined by Peter Townsend: "Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participation in the activities and the living conditions and the amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average family that they are in effect excluded from the ordinary living patterns, customs, and activities."

11. The poverty threshold is the level below which an individual is considered poor. Thus it can also be defined in absolute terms, that is by a certain level of resources, or in relative terms with reference to the living conditions deemed indispensable. For practical purposes, these thresholds are usually calculated with reference to an average standard of living that obtains in a given society at a given time. In France today, people will be considered poor if their personal standard of living is, say, lower than half the average French living standard in the same year. These thresholds are termed relative in that they vary according to time and place. The poverty threshold therefore will not be at the same level in the countries of Western Europe as in the Caucasian countries, for instance, nor will it have the same purchasing power equivalent today as it did earlier.

12. The rapporteur thinks that social cohesion indicators might serve to determine basic reference points enabling all European countries to apprehend the reality experienced by disadvantaged women. At all events, numerical data are evidently lacking in this field. Thus there is a clear need to develop gender-specific indicators and methodologies for differentiating the impact of poverty and social exclusion on women and on men, in all the Council of Europe member states.

13. The rapporteur also emphasises the need to put a rapid halt to the backward trend she observes in society in terms of women's rights. She cannot help noting that girls are still discriminated against from their earliest years, which is an obvious factor for vulnerability to poverty in the future. They are discriminated against in terms of access to school and quality of training, and often confined to poorly paid occupations in spite of their capacities. There is a pressing need for action in this area, both to enforce equal opportunities and to underpin any poverty reduction policy.

III. The process of feminisation of poverty

14. Why are women more vulnerable to poverty? This question is linked with the observed fact that the processes leading women and men into poverty are differentiated according to gender. Moreover, gender-specific constraints make it harder for women in poverty to extricate themselves from poverty.

15. Poverty occurs in various forms, and there are new forms of poverty and marginalisation. It is not characterised solely by inadequate income. Actually it can take the form of limited or non-existent

⁵ See minutes, p. 4.

⁶ See minutes, pp. 1 and 2.

⁷ See own-initiative report by Ms Záborská on Women and poverty in the European Union, 22 September 2005 http://www.europarl.europa.eu/omk/sipade3?PROG=REPORT&L=FR&SORT_ORDER=D&S_REF_A=%25&LEG_ID=6&AUTHOR_ID=23894

access to health and education, a dangerous environment, social discrimination and exclusion. The rapporteur proposes to begin examining some of these factors, particularly the structural kind, that lead to the feminisation of poverty.

Women without economic security

16. The gender-based apportionment of home duties and the discrimination that occurs on the labour market directly affect women's labour market access and participation. In general, they attain less well-paid posts and have less attractive working conditions. Thus part-time work, fixed-term contracts and unemployment make their position still more insecure. Women also have to cope with the "double working day": they are compelled to perform a paid job and at the same time deal with family and household responsibilities. This implies that women and men have unequal workloads, and it also limits women's capacity to compete with men on an equal footing on the labour market. Later in life, women's re-entry into the labour market is complicated by the growing demand for qualifications, compounded by the fact that they have less ready access to vocational training.

17. As far back as 1995, the Platform for Action of the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing⁸ noted that over the previous ten years the number of women living in poverty had increased faster than that of men, especially in developing countries. The feminisation of poverty has also become a major problem in transition countries as a result of the short-term consequences of political, social and economic change. In these countries, although the economic situation has tended to improve, reducing the proportion of poor people from 20% in 1988 to 12% in 2003, poverty remains a major problem, especially in the countries of the South Caucasus and Moldova. The feminisation of poverty in the post-Soviet era is due to the fact that the social system and the massive closure of childcare facilities have left women with a much heavier burden of responsibility in areas such as childcare and the care of the elderly⁹. Employment rates for women are lower than for men and unemployment among women is extremely high, up to 68% in Moldova where the trend is steadily worsening.

Women with fragile economic and social status

18. Single-parent families are often headed by a woman, but support to single-parent families is so inadequate that they are often prone to poverty. There too, the problem of childcare is more acute. Indeed, where a woman is the sole family breadwinner, gainful activity and looking after children cannot be reconciled unless she has a child-minding facility at her disposal. In Europe, four single-parent families out of five are headed by women, who are the poorest of the poor¹⁰.

19. Moreover, even if a woman does not live in a poor household, she may nevertheless find herself in a situation of poverty by not having fair access to the household income. This thought also bolsters the rapporteur's contention that it is indispensable to define specific gender-differentiated indicators, otherwise the poverty and inequalities undergone by women will remain indiscernible. For example, Ms Jones¹¹ draws attention to the problem of hidden poverty among women. In poor families, women assume most of the responsibility for childcare and men earn money. The household income is not equally shared out, and each person keeps what he or she receives. Thus, if the family has a car, it will be used by the man. The woman's poverty will not be apparent. The rapporteur considers it important to address hidden poverty among women and the gap between individual income and expenditure, since women spend more on the children.

⁸ Paragraph 48 of the Platform for Action of the United Nations' 4th World Conference on Women, 1995.

⁹ "Growth, Poverty and Inequality in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union", World Bank report, October 2005:

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/0,,contentMDK;20627214~pagePK:146736~piPK:14830@theSitePK:258599.00.html>

¹⁰ See minutes, statement by Ms Ferreira, p. 3.

¹¹ See minutes, p. 5.

Retirement pensions system unsuited to women's needs in old age

20. Frequent additional factors of vulnerability, advancing age and longevity are harder for women who often receive insufficient income given their possibly increasing burdens such as expenditure to cope with ill-health or reduced self-reliance. In general, action is needed to secure old people's entitlement to a decent pension income on reaching statutory retirement age, ie an income such that they can not only avoid extreme poverty but also keep pace with the development of society's prosperity. Individuals must be able to benefit from a high rate of income replacement on retirement. With elderly women especially, care must be taken that the pension schemes give more credit for the careers of women who assume responsibilities of custody or care – whether of children or of old people – and who request time out from their careers to do so.

21. According to a report on the European Union published in 2006, elderly people are 1.5 to two times more likely to be poor than people in the 16-64 age groups. For women the outlook is still gloomier. According to the report, the average at-risk-of-poverty rate for elderly men in the ten new member states is only 6%, as against 10% for women in the new member states, 16% for elderly men in EU15 and 21% for elderly women in the EU15. Women aged 75 years and over are at the highest risk of poverty.¹²

22. The rapporteur is concerned with the question of how women are rewarded for bringing up children. Women receive very little reward when they reach retirement age, although they helped to bring on the next generation. According to Ms Ginn, in the United Kingdom, one pensioner in five lives in poverty and the poorest are women. Women's average personal income is 57% of that of men¹³.

23. In fact most retirement pension schemes, originally designed for men who had a linear career, are proving outmoded today. There are more women on the labour market than formerly, and they usually have to consider whatever is on offer for taking care of children or dependants. While some elect to be carers, for others the absence of care facilities is very often what compels them to stop working. At all events, they find themselves in a position where periods off work often do not count towards their pensions. For the sake of fairness to those women who stop work, one should consider how to make up for these discontinuities in the retirement pension computation system. Some systems, for example, allow part of parental leave to be credited. Women who have worked part-time are also confronted with the fact that the pension amount is generally lower than a full-time worker's, and often therefore insufficient.

24. To remedy the disadvantages of current retirement pension schemes, the rapporteur suggests that pensions comprise a flat-rate basic amount and an income-related supplement.

IV. Eradicating poverty among women

25. The rapporteur is convinced that the Council of Europe member states can learn more from one another by pooling best practices, and drawing in particular on practice in the Scandinavian countries, where women's and men's high labour market participation rates go hand in hand with fertility rates which are among the highest in Europe; childcare services are free of charge or affordable, and parental leave opportunities and maternity leave rules are factors contributing to women's substantial labour market participation.

26. The rapporteur agrees with the Chairperson of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, Rapporteur on "Women and poverty in the European Union", who emphasises that eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative. The wellbeing of a society can be gauged by the attention it pays to its weakest members. The Lisbon Strategy should therefore transcend the exclusively economic thinking that has so far informed it and embrace a fully human approach. Ways should be sought to promote a close partnership between women and the poorest families, with a view to combating extreme poverty effectively and overcoming

¹² Poverty among the elderly lower in the new member states of the European Union, <http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/world/2006/newEUMembers.htm>

¹³ See minutes, p. 5.

social exclusion, given that women are the first to defend their kin against poverty and social exclusion¹⁴.

27. This problem is two-edged in that the situation of women currently in poor circumstances must be dealt with while planning effective, purposive policies to forestall the drift of women into poverty. The rapporteur is concerned about improving the living conditions and quality of life of European women. She asks policy-makers to become aware, if they have not already done so, of the poverty in which women live and to make a strong commitment to combating it.

28. Employment, though not in itself an adequate hedge against extreme poverty, may prove a reasonably sure way out of poverty for women. Governments and all players concerned will therefore need to include the question of gender equality in their poverty reduction strategy.

29. The rapporteur is quite in favour of research into the behaviour of men who are the focus of social problems. For example, men who do not pay maintenance to their ex-wives or children place the woman who has custody of the children in a difficult financial position. The rapporteur would like to see research into ways of making men who owe maintenance or child maintenance payments face up to their responsibilities, and into solutions if they fail to pay.

30. The concerns of single women or of families on low incomes who must face the problem of childcare tie up with the question of balance between working and family life in an underprivileged environment. Good-quality, accessible and affordable childcare facilities will need to be established. These must also be flexible enough to enable women working atypical hours to have their children looked after. Provision for the custody and care of other dependent persons must also be considered.

31. But certain social policies, according to the yardstick of the principles of social inclusion, do not place these women in a position to benefit from minimum livelihoods. For example, some social security rules deny them access to basic health care. In short, welfare cover that includes the poorest people should be envisaged. The rapporteur is convinced that availability of reproductive health services is absolutely indispensable in relation to efforts aimed at reducing maternal and infant mortality, preventing the spread of HIV/Aids, promoting health and, ultimately, reducing poverty. Access to rights and services as regards sexual and reproductive health is the principal key to promoting health and reducing poverty. Likewise, targeted measures must be implemented to ensure disadvantaged women's access to housing and education.

32. The rapporteur notes that childcare provision differs widely from country to country. The Nordic countries regard childcare as a social right and subsidise its provision heavily. In the United Kingdom and Ireland, subsidies are limited and services for small children are offered by the private sector at market prices. In other countries, such as Hungary and Malta, women are prevented from joining the labour market by the limited number of places in childcare facilities or their high price. Services in south European countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain, along with Poland, are restricted because parents who place their children in day nurseries are subject to public disapproval. Alternative solutions (such as parental leave) or informal options (such as childminding by grandparents) are preferred. Employers play a limited role except in the Netherlands, where the question of childcare is seen as a responsibility to be shared by the state, employers and workers¹⁵. The rapporteur would like childcare facilities to be more flexible, with opening times that more closely match parents' working hours, and to be affordable.

33. In addition, the empowerment of women suffering from poverty means that it is indispensable for socially excluded women to be genuinely involved at all decision-making levels.

34. The rapporteur intends if necessary to emphasise the consequences of extreme poverty which may lead to every form of violence against women, particularly trafficking in women and their children and also their forced prostitution. There are women, often belittled, in parlous financial circumstances, who want to leave their home countries in search of a better future, only to fall prey to people-traffickers.

¹⁴ See minutes, statement by Ms Záborská, p.9.

¹⁵ See minutes, statement by Ms Henrotte-Forsberg, p.8.

V. Conclusion

35. The rapporteur relies on the political authorities' growing awareness to ensure that they will pursue policies of social inclusion for the benefit of poor women. She proposes that the committee adopt the preliminary draft resolution and recommendation appended to this report and submit them to the plenary Assembly.

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Reporting committee: Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Reference to Committee: Doc. 10605, reference No. 3109 of 24 June 2005

Draft resolution and draft recommendation unanimously adopted by the Committee on 17 April 2007

Members of the Committee: Mrs Gülsün **Bilgehan** (Chairperson), Mrs Anna **Čurdová** (1st Vice-Chairperson), Mrs Svetlana Smirnova (2nd Vice-Chairperson), Mr José Mendes Bota (3rd Vice-Chairperson), Ms Elmira Akhundova, Mrs Željka Antunović, Mrs Aneliya Atanasova, Mr John Austin (alternate: Mr **Boswell**), Mr Denis Badré, Ms Marieluise Beck, Mrs Oksana **Bilozir**, Mrs Raisa Bohatyryova (alternate: Mr **Popescu**), Mrs Olena **Bondarenko**, Mrs Mimount **Bousakla**, Mr Paul Bradford, Ms Sanja Čeković, Mrs Ingrida **Circene**, Mr James **Clappison**, Mrs Minodora Cliveti, Mr Cosidó Gutiérrez, Ms Diana Çuli, Mr Ivica Dačić, Mr Marcello Dell'utri, Mr José Luiz Del Roio, Mrs Lydie Err, Mrs Catherine Fautrier, Mrs Maria Emelina Fernández Soriano, Ms Sonia Fertuzinhos, Mrs Margrét Frimannsdóttir (alternate: Ms **Ögmundsdóttir**), Mr Piotr Gadzinowski, Mrs Alena **Gajdůšková**, Mr Pierre Goldberg, Mrs Claude Greff, Mr Attila Gruber, Mrs Carina **Hägg**, Mr Poul-Henrik Hedeboe, Mr Ilie **Ilașcu**, Mrs Halide Incekara, Mrs Eleonora **Katseli**, Mr Marek **Kawa**, Mrs Angela Leahu, Mr Dariusz **Lipinski**, Mr Arthur Loepfe (alternate: Mr **Dupraz**), Ms Assunta **Meloni**, Mrs Danguté **Mikutiené**, Mrs Ilinka Mitreva, Mr Burkhardt Müller-Sönksen, Mrs Christine Muttonen, Mrs Hermine **Naghdalyan**, Mr Kent Olsson, Mrs Vera Oskina, Mr Ibrahim Özal, Ms Elsa Papadimitriou (alternate: Ms **Kanellopoulou**), Mr Jaroslav Paška, Mrs Fatma Pehlivan, Mrs Maria Agostina Pellegatta, Mrs Antigoni Pericleous-Papadopoulos, Mr Leo Platvoet, Mrs Majda Potrata, Mr Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, Mrs Marlene Rupprecht, Mrs Klára Sándor, Mr Arto Satonen, Mr Giannicola Sinisi, Mrs Darinka **Stantcheva**, Mrs Ruth-Gaby **Vermot-Mangold**, Mrs Betty **Williams**, Mrs Jenny Willott (alternate: Mr **Gray**), Mr Gert Winkelmeier, Ms Karin S. Woldseth, Mrs Gisela **Wurm**.

N.B.: The names of the members who took part in the meeting are printed in **bold**

Head of the Secretariat: Ms Kleinsorge

Secretaries to the Committee: Ms Affholder, Ms Devaux, Mr Diallo