

Wednesday 6 May 2009

Active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market

P6_TA(2009)0371

European Parliament resolution of 6 May 2009 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market (2008/2335(INI))

(2010/C 212 E/06)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission Communication of 3 October 2008 on a Commission Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market (COM(2008)0639),
- having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Articles 99, 137 and 141 thereof,
- having regard to Commission Recommendation 2008/867/EC of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to Council Recommendation 92/441/EEC of 24 June 1992 on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions following the meeting of the Brussels European Council of 11 and 12 December 2008,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 13 February 2009 entitled 'Proposal for the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2009' (COM(2009)0058) and the Commission staff working document of 24 February 2009 entitled 'Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008; Country Profiles' (SEC(2009)0255),
- having regard to its resolution of 30 November 2006 on the situation of people with disabilities in the enlarged European Union: the European Action Plan 2006-2007 ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 September 2006 on improving the mental health of the population. Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to progress made in equal opportunities and non-discrimination in the EU concerning the transposition of Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC,
- having regard to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees,
- having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,
- having regard to Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation ⁽⁵⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 307, 18.11.2008, p. 11.⁽²⁾ OJ L 245, 26.8.1992, p. 46.⁽³⁾ OJ C 316 E, 22.12.2006, p. 370.⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 305 E, 14.12.2006, p. 148.⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16.

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- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions following the meeting of the Barcelona European Council on 15 and 16 March 2002,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 17 October 2007 entitled ‘Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market’ (COM(2007)0620) and to Parliament’s resolution of 9 October 2008 on promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, including child poverty, in the EU ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the European social partners’ recommendations in the report of 18 October 2007 entitled Key Challenges Facing European Labour Markets: A Joint Analysis of European Social Partners,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 26 February 2007 entitled ‘Social reality stock-taking – Interim report to the 2007 Spring European Council’ (COM(2007)0063) and to Parliament’s resolution of 15 November 2007 thereon ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 2 July 2008 entitled ‘Renewed social agenda: Opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st century Europe’ (COM(2008)0412) and to Parliament’s resolution of 6 May 2009 thereon ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 12 October 2006 entitled ‘The long-term sustainability of public finances in the EU’ (COM(2006)0574) and to Parliament’s resolution of 20 November 2008 on the future of social security systems and pensions: their financing and the trend towards individualisation ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to its declaration of 22 April 2008 on ending street homelessness ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 23 May 2007 on promoting decent work for all ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to Decision No 1098/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2008 on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) ⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 February 2009 on Social Economy ⁽⁸⁾,
- having regard to Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning ⁽⁹⁾,
- having regard to Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning ⁽¹⁰⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 January 2008 on adult learning: it is never too late to learn ⁽¹¹⁾,
- having regard to the Protocol, annexed to the Treaty of Lisbon, on services of general interest ⁽¹²⁾,

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0467.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 282 E, 6.11.2008, p. 463.

⁽³⁾ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2009)0370.

⁽⁴⁾ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0556.

⁽⁵⁾ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0163.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 102 E, 24.4.2008, p. 321.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 298, 7.11.2008, p. 20.

⁽⁸⁾ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2009)0062.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 45.

⁽¹¹⁾ OJ C 41 E, 19.2.2009, p. 46.

⁽¹²⁾ OJ C 306, 17.12.2007, p. 158.

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- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A6-0263/2009),
- A. whereas active inclusion must not replace social inclusion, as vulnerable groups unable to participate in the labour market have a right to a dignified life and full participation in society, and therefore a minimum income and accessible and affordable high-quality social services must be available regardless of a person's ability to participate in the labour market,
- B. whereas active inclusion is not only related to the capacity of the individual, but also to the way in which society is organised; whereas, therefore, the structural causes of exclusion, including discrimination and inadequate service provision, also need to be addressed,
- C. whereas apparent exclusion from the labour market may be the result of a lack of availability of sufficient decent employment possibilities rather than the result of a lack of individual effort,
- D. whereas integration into the labour market must not be a precondition for the entitlement to a minimum income and access to high-quality social services; whereas a minimum income and access to high-quality social services are necessary preconditions for integration into the labour market,
- E. whereas those furthest from the labour market are often people with multiple and complex needs, difficulties or disadvantages such as long-term dependence on low or inadequate income, long-term unemployment, a low level of education and illiteracy, growing up in a vulnerable family, disability, poor health, living in areas of multiple disadvantages, precarious housing conditions and homelessness, and racism and discrimination and therefore strategies for inclusion need to reflect the diversity of those excluded,
- F. whereas social exclusion and exclusion from the labour market have a serious impact on the mental health of people affected, and whereas long-term unemployed people have a greater risk of experiencing depression and other mental health disorders,
- G. whereas those distant from the labour market have a great need for vocational training either because their schooling was inadequate or because, having spent a long time away from the labour market, they are no longer able to make effective use of their education,
- H. whereas the most vulnerable are often affected by conditionality in activation policies and whereas those effects need to be monitored and negative impacts on vulnerable groups need to be avoided,
- I. whereas active inclusion measures must also work in conjunction with the development of EU and national targets concerning the fight against poverty and social exclusion,
- J. whereas most heads of households are women, most single parents are women and most carers are women; whereas, therefore, active inclusion policies require an all-encompassing set of measures to enable women furthest from the labour market to benefit in practice from active inclusion strategies; whereas the labour market situation for women has direct links to age-related poverty which mainly affects women,
- K. whereas in times of economic downturn and growing unemployment, there is a risk of large numbers of new people made redundant swelling those already suffering from poverty and exclusion from the labour market, especially for the most vulnerable social groups such as women, elderly people, people with disabilities; whereas it is essential that social inclusion and related labour market policy be pursued by way of an integrated and coherent approach within the European Economic Recovery Plan; whereas part of public funds should be used to maintain and improve social, health and education investments and other essential social services and services of general interest,

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L. whereas the view that the best way out of exclusion is to be in work can only be truly effective if that work is sustainable, high-quality work, which is adequately remunerated; whereas the principle of equal pay for equal work also remains poorly implemented,

M. whereas family carers provide essential services of care, education and support outside the system of employment, without income or social rights, and lack the right to re-enter the labour market and to obtain recognition of skills acquired or developed during periods of family caring,

1. Welcomes the fact that the Commission based its Recommendation 2008/867/EC on Recommendation 92/441/EEC which recognises the individual's fundamental right to sufficient resources and assistance to live in human dignity and defines common principles for implementing that right; endorses the common principles and practical guidelines presented in Recommendation 2008/867/EC on the active inclusion strategy based on three pillars, namely adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services; and in particular points out that any active inclusion strategy has to be built on the principles of individual rights, respect for human dignity and non-discrimination, equality of opportunities and gender equality, on the promotion of labour market integration combined with full participation in society, and on the realisation of the principles of quality, adequacy and accessibility across all three pillars;

2. Agrees with the Council that the implementation of Recommendation 92/441/EEC needs to be improved in relation to minimum income and social transfers, that social assistance should provide an adequate minimum income for a dignified life, at least at a level which is above the 'at risk of poverty' level and sufficient to lift people out of poverty, and that the take-up of benefits should be improved;

3. Welcomes the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Communities of 17 July 2008 in Case C-303/06 concerning carers suffering discrimination by association; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take adequate measures to ensure that carers are protected from such discrimination in accessing the labour market and encourages the Member States to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Court's judgment is complied with;

4. Calls on the Member States to implement adequate income support so as to fight poverty and social exclusion; points to the need for an adequate income support level based on Recommendations 92/441/EEC and 2008/867/EC which must be adequate, transparent, accessible to all, and sustainable over time;

5. Considers it vital that the Commission and the Member States implement Directive 2000/78/EC, which establishes a legal framework for equal treatment in employment to combat discrimination in employment and occupation on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, effectively;

6. Underlines its request to the Council to agree an EU target for minimum income schemes and contributory replacement income schemes of providing income support of at least 60 % of national median equalised income and, furthermore, to agree a timetable for achieving this target in all Member States;

7. Recognises that the interaction of social assistance and labour market activity is complex: in particular when the available work may be short-term, seasonal, precarious or part-time and when entitlement conditions and social protection systems or marginal tax rates may have a disincentive effect on the take-up of paid employment and the social assistance system is too rigid to respond; therefore urges the development of systems, which effectively support individuals in a period of transition rather than penalising or discouraging them or removing assistance too rapidly when an individual takes up work;

8. Points to the importance of providing for welfare benefits for vulnerable persons in a position to work; points out, however, that by virtue of the subsidiarity principle such benefits are a matter for the Member States;

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9. Points out that the recipients of adequate income support and their family members will have the opportunity to avoid the risk of poverty and to become active citizens who contribute to social and economic life as well as to intergenerational solidarity;
10. Suggests that the Member States actively consider a minimum wage policy in order to tackle the growing number of 'working poor' and make work a viable prospect for those distant from the labour market;
11. Believes that active inclusion necessitates the reduction of inequalities between regions and areas within the Community, through accelerated rehabilitation of the areas affected by the economic crisis and development of rural regions;
12. Calls on the Member States to take action to fight clandestine or 'submerged' employment, which excludes those affected from certain social facilities and services;
13. Requests that active inclusion policies should:
- be consistent with a lifecycle approach to education, life-long learning, social and employment policies;
 - be tailor-made, targeted and needs-oriented;
 - be based on an integrated approach and participative; and
 - respect pre-conditions which are essential to allow participation without creating conditions that endanger a minimum living income;
14. Invites the Commission to consider whole-cost accounting in the field of active and social inclusion as experience has shown that early investment and preventive action can reduce overall cost for society in the long term; welcomes the fact that Recommendation 2008/867/EC proposes to increase investment in social inclusion accordingly;
15. Considers that the Member States should provide targeted additional benefits for disadvantaged groups (such as people with disabilities or chronic diseases, single parents, or households with many children) which cover extra costs in connection, inter alia, with personal support, the use of specific facilities and medical and social care, establishing inter alia affordable price levels for medicines for less advantaged social groups; stresses the need to ensure decent invalidity and retirement pension levels;
16. Agrees, especially in the light of people's often complex needs, that there is a need to design and implement tailor-made active inclusion measures that combine minimum income, labour market inclusion and social services, that there must be a focus on early identification and preventive action, and that priority should be given to targeting the most vulnerable persons;
17. Considers that in designing and implementing such measures, the views of those at whom these measures are aimed should be taken into account; calls on the Member States to support the empowerment of social non-governmental organisations in order to facilitate their participation in the formulation and implementation of inclusion policies;
18. Calls on the Member States to develop a more constructive approach to drugs policy with the emphasis on prevention, education and treatment for addiction rather than criminal sanctions;
19. Calls for the de-stigmatisation of people with mental health problems and learning disabilities, the promotion of mental health and well-being, the prevention of mental disorders as well as for increased resources for treatment and care;

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20. Considers that, because problems associated with exclusion are in many cases present from the earliest years of life, preventive action is essential to identify from an early age those children and young people most at risk, well before they drop out of education and training; notes that young people excluded from school are more likely to get involved in anti-social and criminal behaviour, compounding the challenges of entering the labour market at a later date; considers that a broad stakeholder dialogue and support for preventive action and social services to improve opportunities for vulnerable children and young adults are critical to the success of inclusion policies; also stresses the importance of problems of exclusion affecting older people who lose their jobs and cannot rejoin the labour market;

21. Considers that the needs of young people seeking a first job should be taken into careful consideration and that policies and measures that can foster the transition from education into the labour market should be taken at national level; considers further that structured dialogue with youth organisations should be continuously associated with the work of the EU institutions and of the Member States;

22. Calls on the Member States to do more to address issues faced by carers, including the right to choose freely whether they want to be a carer and the extent of the care that they provide, the possibility of combining caring with paid work and employment as well as access to social security schemes and pensions, in order to avoid impoverishment as a consequence of caring;

23. Welcomes the recognition of the need for universal access to affordable and high-quality social services as a fundamental right and as an essential element of the European Social Model as well as to support the maintenance of people in work and the principles set out in Recommendation 2008/867/EC; considers that such social services include stable, affordable housing, accessible public transport, basic vocational training, and healthcare provision as well as access to affordable energy and other network services; notes that progress must be made on guaranteeing universal service obligations in services of general interest; considers that the development of a plan of action to establish an EU framework directive on services of general interest to guarantee these obligations is necessary; notes that progress remains inadequate in reaching the Barcelona targets set for affordable, high-quality childcare provision, which should be strengthened to cover all children in primary education; also notes that the care needs for other dependants are also inadequately met and should be subject to a similar process;

24. Believes that tackling discrimination faced by people in the context of access to goods, services and facilities is central to achieving inclusion and therefore welcomes the proposal for a comprehensive directive to combat discrimination outside of employment on the grounds of age, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief;

25. Encourages Member States to consider social default tariffs for vulnerable groups, for example in the fields of energy and public transport and also facilities for obtaining microcredits, so as to promote active inclusion, as well as free healthcare and education for people with difficulties of a material nature;

26. Calls on the Member States to increase the profile of credit unions to help offer individuals a safe and regulated environment for people to save and borrow money and to counter increasingly problematic personal debt; calls on the Member States to ensure that individuals have the right to open an affordable bank account, which is an essential means by which to participate in both economic activities and society;

27. Calls on the Member States to provide people with disabilities with the additional support necessary both in order to access the labour market and while working; calls on those Member States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify both the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol; notes that the Member States should establish appropriate procedures and structures for effective implementation of that Convention in their territory;

28. Believes that young people face specific obstacles to active inclusion including unjustified age-related discrimination and difficulties in relation to access to affordable vocational training schemes;

29. Welcomes the deinstitutionalisation of people with disabilities but notes that this requires a sufficient level of community-based services favouring independent living, the right to personal assistance, the right to economic independence and full participation in society within the Member States;

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30. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to provide adequate resources to facilitate access to life-long learning programmes as a means of limiting the exclusion of older people among others from employment and to foster their continuous participation in social, cultural and civic life;
31. Believes that more action should be taken to tackle domestic violence and the abuse of children and older people;
32. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that the existing Community legislation on gender equality, equality generally, and non-discrimination is fully, properly and effectively implemented; calls for its extension and enforcement to remove structural barriers to employment and professional education and training;
33. Believes that high-quality education is a vital prerequisite for successful future employment and integration; calls on the Member States to extend legislation on public education with a view to eliminating any and all barriers to education, ensuring integrated education and access for all; believes that those who have been excluded from the labour market for a long time must have greater entitlements to funding for lifelong learning, especially where 'key competences' are concerned;
34. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to apply the principle of gender mainstreaming throughout the Active Inclusion strategy;
35. Considers that training offered should take account of the needs of the individuals concerned and be appropriate to them; calls for targeted rather than standardised training and integration measures which often disregard the needs of people with disabilities, those with caring responsibilities or persons with health problems; points to best practices from the European Social Fund (ESF) and EQUAL as regards targeted needs-based training approaches for those farthest from the labour market, recognising non-documented skills and skills acquired through non-formal education;
36. Recommends improving the quality of education and integrating education systems with the labour market and social participation criteria, as well as reducing inequalities in access to all forms of education and in the quality of the education offered;
37. Considers that training should also ensure that individuals are aware of their rights and obligations at work, including sound preparation in terms of health and safety and their rights to trade union membership as well as their rights to information and consultation and to lifelong learning and training;
38. Notes that there is a risk that more imaginative approaches to prepare those furthest from the labour market for eventual access to it may be deprived of funding in favour of a more narrow approach based on easily quantifiable outcomes; calls on the Commission, therefore, to improve the funding for bottom-up approaches under Structural Funds, and particularly under the ESF, and the development of indicators that measure the progress made to social and active inclusion, so as to target innovative grass-roots initiatives to promote active inclusion, as part of the social inclusion objectives highlighted as part of the Lisbon earmarking of Structural Funds, the proposed funding on social innovation, and through other funding streams;
39. Notes that as a result of changing demographics, it is estimated that by 2030 the ratio of active to inactive people will be 2:1; calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop active inclusion policies to ensure that carers, many of whom will be obliged to withdraw from the labour market due to caring responsibilities, are not adversely affected in later years;
40. Points to the necessity of creating an inclusive labour market as the core of any active inclusion strategy, a labour market with decent working conditions and job diversity for all workers taking into account different workplace needs, individual workers' requirements, working patterns and time models, differing skill levels, and different needs in terms of reconciliation of family, private and professional life; notes that high-quality employment is essential to promote job retention;

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41. Calls on the Member States to promote a competitive labour market favouring the development of public and private social protection systems at reasonable cost, enabling those concerned, including members of ethnic minorities, to have the choice of reducing the risks of exclusion from the labour market;

42. Calls on the Member States to use tools and instruments so as to motivate all actors to create inclusive labour markets and improve the participation of those farthest from the labour market; points to instruments in the context of localised social dialogue, financial incentives, tax benefits and the development of the social economy; welcomes the Commission's recommendation to provide support for the social economy as a vital source of entry jobs for disadvantaged people;

43. Points out that the role of local and regional authorities in promoting active inclusion is threefold: as employers, promoters of economic development and employment, and as providers of public services, including services for the most vulnerable groups; calls on the Member States to establish networks at regional and local levels to advise and refer people on where they can receive help in accessing the labour market as well as specific social services (i.e. social benefits schemes, health, mental health and social care services, and vocational training) according to their particular situation;

44. Strongly believes that more should be done to tackle the barriers to inclusion faced by asylum seekers; calls on the Member States to work to end asylum seekers' dependence on benefits by allowing them to work and consider the development of more legal immigration routes;

45. Urges all Member States to safeguard human rights-based asylum policies in accordance with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and other relevant human rights legislation;

46. Recognises that human trafficking results in immense suffering and social exclusion and calls on the Member States to do more to enforce anti-trafficking and anti-discrimination legislation, reintegrate the victims of trafficking into society and, in particular, to sign, ratify and implement the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings;

47. Urges the Commission and the Member States to reject the misleading blurring of economic migration with asylum-seeking, and of economic migration and asylum-seeking with illegal immigration;

48. Believes that the imprisonment of people without adequate rehabilitation and education creates barriers to inclusion and often only leads to further social exclusion, unemployment and crime;

49. Believes strongly that the retention of a mandatory retirement age acts as a barrier to active inclusion and forces many people, who may want to choose to continue to work, out of the labour market unnecessarily;

50. Calls on the Commission to coordinate closely the policy process in relation to active inclusion, in particular as regards high-quality social services, with the ongoing development of a voluntary framework on high-quality social services of general interest, and to examine without delay all possible means of clarifying the legal context in which social services general interest operate and providing them with a legal framework to serve as a point of reference, in particular by adopting legislative instruments including a framework directive;

51. Underlines its recent request to the Commission and the Council to set targets for the reduction of poverty (poverty in general, child poverty, in-work poverty and persistent long-term poverty), for a minimum level of income provided through pensions and for access to health care and for its quality (reducing infant mortality, improving health and increasing life expectancy, etc.); reiterates its requests to set an EU target to reduce child poverty by 50 % by 2012 and to end street homelessness of children, youth and adults alike by 2015;

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52. Calls for a concrete roadmap for the implementation of active inclusion strategies based on the participation of civil society and other stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty; considers that the roadmap should specify time lines and realistic qualitative and quantitative targets based on specific indicators and on detailed dialogue between the interested parties; considers also that the roadmap should set out how active inclusion is to be implemented and monitored through the Open Method of Coordination for social protection and social inclusion, particularly at local, regional and national level; therefore welcomes the initiative of the Commission to involve local authorities in monitoring the implementation of active inclusion strategies through financing a network of local authorities' observatories on active inclusion by the Progress programme; asks the Commission and the Member States to give those observatories a strong role in the future policy process and mainstream active inclusion programmes through the national reform programmes of the revised Lisbon Strategy and in particularly the European Employment Strategy;

53. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.
