

**29th SESSION**  
**Strasbourg, 20-22 October 2015**

**CG/2015(29)9FINAL**  
22 October 2015

## **Fighting the increasing poverty of women: the responsibility of local and regional authorities**

Current Affairs Committee  
Rapporteur:<sup>1</sup> Jean-Louis TESTUD, France (L, EPP/CCE)

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### *Summary*

This report provides a local and regional dimension to the analysis and policies under way in the Council of Europe in order to combat the increasing poverty of women. Its aim is to identify local and regional policy mechanisms that are instrumental in 'feminising' poverty and to evaluate the action needed to combat poverty at the local and regional level, particularly by cataloguing good practice. The report also provides examples of strategic action for mainstreaming equality in the social cohesion policies of local and regional authorities.

The report invites local and regional authorities to adopt policies and take measures that will prevent the victims of austerity policies from falling into 'chronic' poverty, with all the attendant problems for them and their children and to promote the care economy. It calls on national governments to adopt a multi-level governance model in their approach to combat poverty, to support local and regional action in this sphere, and to systematically consider any consequences for human rights and especially social and economic rights affecting women when framing macro-economic policies.

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1 L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions  
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress  
SOC: Socialist Group  
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group  
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group  
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

## **Fighting the increasing poverty of women: the responsibility of local and regional authorities**

### **RESOLUTION 391 (2015) <sup>2</sup>**

1. The Council of Europe actively supports the idea of a right to protection from poverty, particularly through its Revised European Social Charter on the basis of the understanding that poverty is not the problem of the people suffering it but the problem of society as a whole. However, it is also true that poverty affects different sectors of the population in diverse ways. Research into poverty over the past few decades has shown that a holistic approach that takes into account all the dimensions involved is essential. This is crucial in order to develop solutions that are adapted to the particular needs of the more vulnerable members of the population such as women and children.

2. In 2007 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) alerted its member States to the feminisation of poverty and suggested practical countermeasures against this development. PACE also put forward measures for combating poverty and called for 'the root causes of women's poverty' to be tackled in its Resolution 1800 and Recommendation 1963 in 2011.

3. The Commissioner for Human Rights in his paper, *Safeguarding human rights in times of economic crisis* (2014), recommended that member States to conduct human rights and equality impact assessments of social and economic policies and budgets, to promote equality, and to work towards social protection floors for all.

4. Today women, who are more vulnerable socially and economically than men, are the first to suffer the effects of the crisis. They are more subject to poverty which complicates access to food, housing, education and health-care, causing deprivation, which in turn is an obstacle to the full enjoyment of human rights, whether civil, social, cultural or political. Women are much more dependent on the work of public authorities, whether nationally, regionally or locally. This fact is ample justification for studying the potential of local and regional authorities to combat female poverty.

5. The Congress, committed to the gender mainstreaming policy of the Council of Europe, and aware of the responsibilities incumbent upon local and regional authorities in upholding human rights and countering the adverse effects of the economic crisis, underlines the need to identify local and regional policy mechanisms that are instrumental in 'feminising' poverty. This "stocktaking" exercise is the first step to assess the action required to combat poverty at local and regional level and to explore the available means of protecting women's rights during a crisis, particularly by cataloguing good practice.

6. In light of the above and with a view to improving the economic situation of women, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities invites local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe, to:

a. take stock of the existing situation by establishing statistical tools to measure women's income poverty and identify problems arising from a lack of access in areas such as the level of education, language barriers or belief-based restrictions (such as prohibition on consulting a doctor of the opposite sex);

b. adopt a multi-level governance approach that aims to co-ordinate the elaboration and implementation of measures across different territorial levels avoiding duplication;

c. adopt policies and take measures that will prevent 'the new poor' – the victims of austerity policies – from falling into 'chronic' poverty, with all the attendant problems for them and their children;

d. encourage and support women's self-organisation in order to improve provision of social services and to create jobs and income;

e. offer women in poverty free services in the area of reproductive health-care such as maternal and newborn health, family planning, prevention of unsafe abortion, and the management of infections and diseases including HIV/AIDS);

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<sup>2</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 21 October 2015, 2d sitting (see Document CG/2015(29)9FINAL, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Jean-Louis TESTUD, France (L, EPP/CCE).

*f.* promote sustainable economies which prioritise caring for people and nature (“care economy”) whilst acknowledging the value of women’s work and recognising them as the solution to many of our social problems rather than as victims;

*g.* highlight the utility of exchanging good practices in order to be able to make pertinent policy choices and combining the development of a sustainable economy with the well-being of citizens, making more use of international networks to exchange information between local and regional administrative departments;

*h.* consider promoting urban agriculture in the context of the development of a social and solidarity economy, to improve food security while generating income and providing more employment opportunities for women;

*i.* consider, in the long run, exploring the possibility of an “automatic” application of social and economic rights to avoid failure to exercise them, particularly for women whose access to such rights may be limited.

## Fighting the increasing poverty of women: the responsibility of local and regional authorities

### RECOMMENDATION 381 (2015)<sup>3</sup>

1. The Council of Europe actively supports the idea of a right to protection from poverty, particularly through its Revised European Social Charter on the basis of the understanding that poverty is not the problem of the people suffering it but the problem of society as a whole. However, it is also true that poverty affects different sectors of the population in diverse ways. Research into poverty over the past few decades has shown that a holistic approach that takes into account all the dimensions involved is essential. It is crucial to take account of the multiple dimensions of poverty in order to develop solutions that are adapted to the particular needs of the more vulnerable members of the population such as women and children.

2. In 2007 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) alerted its member States to the feminisation of poverty and suggested practical countermeasures against this development. PACE also put forward measures for combating poverty and called for 'the root causes of women's poverty' to be tackled in its Resolution 1800 and Recommendation 1963 in 2011.

3. The Commissioner for Human Rights in his paper, *Safeguarding human rights in times of economic crisis* (2014) recommended that member States conduct human rights and equality impact assessments of social and economic policies and budgets, to promote equality, and to work towards social protection floors for all.

4. Today women, who are more vulnerable socially and economically than men, are the first to suffer the effects of the crisis. They are more subject to poverty which complicates access to food, housing, education and health-care, causing deprivation, which in turn is an obstacle to the full enjoyment of human rights, whether civil, social, cultural or political. Women are much more dependent on the work of public authorities, whether nationally, regionally or locally. This fact is ample justification for studying the potential of local and regional authorities to combat female poverty.

5. The Congress, committed to the gender mainstreaming policy of the Council of Europe, and aware of the responsibilities incumbent upon local and regional authorities in upholding human rights and countering the adverse effects of the economic crisis, underlines the need to identify local and regional policy mechanisms that are instrumental in 'feminising' poverty and to assess the action required to combat poverty at local and regional level, while exploring the available means of protecting women's rights during a crisis, particularly by cataloguing good practice.

6. In light of the above and with a view to improving the economic situation of women, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities invites the member States of the Council of Europe, to:

a. systematically consider any consequences for human rights and especially social and economic rights affecting women when framing macro-economic policies, in line with the gender mainstreaming guidelines adopted by the Council of Europe;

b. take account of any consequences for social assistance at local level when making decisions on social spending;

c. consider establishing statistical tools to measure women's income poverty and setting social protection floors or universal (non-contributory) minimum income schemes that can improve women's economic situation;

d. review their legislation in order to individualise social and economic rights so as to empower women as individuals often responsible for children as single parents;

e. support local and regional action in this sphere and adopt a multi-level governance approach in the elaboration and implementation of measures, and for raising the resources required for the introduction of relevant programmes at local and regional level.

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<sup>3</sup> Debated and adopted by the Congress on 21 October 2015, 2d sitting (see Document CG/2015(29)9FINAL, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Jean-Louis TESTUD, France (L, EPP/CCE).

# Fighting the increasing poverty of women: the responsibility of local and regional authorities

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM<sup>4</sup>

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report provides a local and regional dimension to the analysis and policies under way in the Council of Europe in order to combat the feminisation of poverty. The economic crisis and the austerity measures that have often replaced social protection policies since 2010 have led to increasing poverty in Europe. Among the causes of the rising figures pertaining to poverty are the austerity policies that have resulted in cuts to social spending budgets and a restructuring of the economy.

2. Although the Council of Europe had alerted its members to the feminisation of poverty already in 2007<sup>5</sup> and suggested practical countermeasures, today, women are once again the first to suffer the effects of the crisis. While at the outset the victims seemed to be men made redundant in the industrial sector, at present it is above all women - more vulnerable socially and economically who are suffering.

3. Women are more subject to poverty, and this poverty is often greater than that suffered by men. It complicates access to food, housing, education and healthcare. It causes deprivation, which is an obstacle to full enjoyment of human rights, whether civil, social, cultural or political. Women are much more dependent on the work of public authorities, whether nationally, regionally or locally. This fact is ample justification for studying the potential of local and regional authorities to combat female poverty.

<sup>4</sup> This explanatory memorandum is based on the contribution of Francine MESTRUM, member of the International Council of the World Social Forum and responsible for Global Social Justice, and is available from the Secretariat upon request.

<sup>5</sup> Recommendation 1800 (2007) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

4. Does this development mean, however, that there is a ‘feminisation of poverty’? It all depends on how poverty is defined and approached in theory. What is beyond doubt is that poverty comes in different shapes for men and women. Amidst a continuing economic crisis, the Council of Europe is reasserting the relevance of the European model of human rights and calling for universal access to protection from poverty.

5. This report is a response to the recommendations of the Commissioner for Human Rights in his recent paper, *Safeguarding human rights in times of economic crisis* (2014): to conduct human rights and equality impact assessments of social and economic policies and budgets, to promote equality, and to work towards social protection floors for all. The Council of Europe actively supports the idea of a right to protection from poverty, particularly through the Revised European Social Charter. Since 2010 this right has also been promoted by the Council of Europe and European Union as part of their joint project called ‘Human rights of people living in poverty’. In 2011 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe put forward measures for combating poverty and called for ‘the root causes of women’s poverty’ to be tackled (Resolution 1800 and Recommendation 1963 (2011)).

### 1.1. Aim of the report

6. The purpose of this report is to identify local and regional policy mechanisms that are instrumental in ‘feminising’ poverty. It will assess action to combat poverty at local and regional level and explore the available mechanics of protecting women’s rights during a crisis, particularly by cataloguing good practice. It will also suggest strategic action for mainstreaming equality in the social cohesion policies of local and regional authorities.

7. The report will first of all focus on definitions and clarifying meanings and then consider the situation with regard to statistics. Section 2 includes an account of the gender aspects of poverty and a discussion of social policy developments. Section 3 looks at local government tools and potential for combating poverty, especially poverty among women. Section 4 undertakes a more detailed study of the various dimensions of this poverty, covering human rights and the rights enshrined in the Council of Europe’s Revised European Social Charter, the issue of equality, especially in the labour market, the effects of the crisis and the role of social security, sustainable development and migration. The fifth and last section makes a number of recommendations to help protect women against poverty.

### 1.2. Clarifying meanings

8. The meaning of the word ‘poverty’ seems self-evident to most people. However, a closer look reveals important differences that often prevent us from taking the right approach to eradicating it. A definition is necessary for distinguishing various forms and degrees of poverty, such as extreme, absolute and relative poverty or income poverty and multidimensional poverty.

9. The question of concepts and definitions is especially important for poverty in that almost all the definitions are normative and contain the answer to the problem through the way in which they are articulated. Income poverty will disappear with increased income transfers to people in poverty, whereas multidimensional poverty can be eradicated only through a series of actions in different areas (health, education, housing, etc.) that will not necessarily take low income into account.

10. Relative poverty – defined in relation to the general prosperity and well-being of the society in which it occurs, unlike absolute poverty, which takes into account only minimum subsistence – suggests that one of its aspects is inequality. A basic distinction must therefore be drawn. Inequality, which has increased in almost every country over past decades,<sup>6 7</sup> is a relational concept that does not imply the existence of poverty if those at the bottom of the ladder still have an income enabling them to lead a decent life. Moreover, it is not always considered a problem<sup>8</sup> even if though it may be a cause of poverty.<sup>9</sup>

11. To avoid any confusion or misunderstanding, this report will take the European Union (EU) approach, which focuses on relative poverty. For the EU, an individual is poor if he or she has an income under 60% of the society’s median income. Combating poverty will inevitably mean tackling the various dimensions typical of individuals and families living in poverty.

6 OECD, *Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising*, Paris, OECD, 2011.

7 Inequality Watch, [www.inequalitywatch.eu](http://www.inequalitywatch.eu) (accessed March 2015).

8 Economist, ‘Does Inequality Matter?’, *The Economist*, 16-22 June 2001, pp. 11-22.

9 Salama, P. & Valier, J., *Pauvretés et inégalités dans le tiers monde*, Paris, La Découverte, 1994, p. 13.

12. However, it is important to mention here the distinction between income poverty and multidimensional poverty and see how they articulate with that of social exclusion, in order to understand and effectively combat poverty.

13. Income poverty takes account only of family or individual income that fails to meet a specific threshold and essentially refers to the inability to fulfil basic needs. Multidimensional poverty or deprivation refers to a set of “dimensions” typical of individuals and families living in poverty: lack of access to healthcare, lack of education, lack of decent housing and also lack of participation in the labour market. The multidimensional approach incorporates the notion of a standard of living which renders it very useful for the elaboration of policies required to deal with social exclusion.

14. The notion of social exclusion allows us to deal with the condition of poverty through the study of the processes leading to exclusion rather than examining it as a static condition. For some authors,<sup>10 11</sup> poverty is simply a specific form of social exclusion, and they see it as a system of interconnected types of exclusion covering various fields of individual and collective existence.

15. However, while the concept of exclusion has a certain moral value and can be used to study the dynamics associated with entering and leaving poverty, it can also become a catch-all term for discussing income poverty, unemployment, and food, health or education insecurity. In other words, this concept conveys the general erosion of living conditions.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3. Poverty statistics

16. We do not have comparable statistics for the whole of the geographical area covered by Council of Europe member states, but we do have statistics for the 28 EU member states. We also have them for every country of the world thanks to the World Bank data bank, but these figures are based on a poverty threshold of US\$1.25 a day, which is hardly relevant to the wealthy countries of Western Europe. We also have the reports that almost all countries have submitted to the United Nations (UN) for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women (Beijing + 20). The first item of the Platform for Action adopted at that conference concerned women and poverty. The reports often contain brief accounts of poverty trends in the relevant countries, but they do not specify the methodology or poverty thresholds used. Consequently, there is no point in comparing these statistics.

## II. THE GENDER ASPECT OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL POLICIES

17. There is academic controversy over the definition and the very existence of ‘feminisation’ of poverty.

18. In its 2007 resolution on the feminisation of poverty, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe noted that ‘the term “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’.<sup>13</sup>

19. These three factors are hard to verify inasmuch as income poverty is measured for households and we have very little data on income distribution within families. Of course, figures on poverty among women are published from time to time, but they must be read with great caution. For instance, when it is concluded from measurement of their income that 70% of women are ‘poor’, this overlooks the fact that a large number of women have no income because they are not active in the labour market if they live in families where another member – their husband or partner – can earn a comfortable income. Their independence may well be questioned but describing them as ‘poor’ or assuming equal distribution of income within families contributes nothing to our understanding of the phenomenon.

20. The field in which we have statistics is that of discrimination against women, whether in healthcare, education, politics, employment, pay or access to property. This is where ‘multidimensional’ poverty may help us understand the phenomenon better, although this type of discrimination does not necessarily lead to poverty. While there are still fewer girls than boys in primary schools, this does not mean that the girls will live in poverty when they grow up but the boys will not. Similarly, in the fields of culture and tradition, while

10 Atkinson, T., ‘La pauvreté et l’exclusion sociale en Europe’ in Atkinson, T. et al., *Pauvreté et exclusion*, Paris, La Documentation française, 1998.

11 Vranken, J. et al., *Armoede en sociale uitsluiting*, Leuven, Acco, 1998, p. 33.

12 Brisset, C. (ed.), *Pauvretés*, Paris, Hachette, 1996, p. 46.

13 Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Resolution 1558 (2007), *The feminisation of poverty*.

girls are often forced into early marriage and this is an obstacle to their education, independence and emancipation, it tells us nothing about whether or not they are going to be poor.

21. There seems to be virtual consensus that female household heads run a serious risk of sliding into poverty. Indeed the risk is much higher for such women than for women in a nuclear family. However, it should also be stressed that the great majority of single women with children are not living in poverty (66% in EU-27).<sup>14</sup> Moreover, many women in Europe and elsewhere prefer a single life with or without children and with a lower income to life as part of a couple, where domestic work, domination and occasional violence are the norm.<sup>15</sup> The fact remains that we lack the statistics to be able to generalise about women's income poverty.

22. We should therefore study the various dimensions for which we do have data and on which it is necessary to work in order to reduce the risk of poverty for women. There is no disagreement on the gender aspect of poverty: poverty is not experienced in the same way by men and by women, it does not have the same causes, and the conditions for leaving it are also different. This may be illustrated by three examples.

23. Firstly, poverty has a gender dimension in its causes. It is obvious that, for men, loss of employment and/or benefits plays a key role. Such losses also affect women, but other factors come into play that have nothing to do with the labour market. Divorce is very often a direct cause of poverty, especially if the woman was limited to domestic work before separation and has little or no experience in the labour market. Another much more frequent cause of poverty among women is an inadequate pension because of an incomplete or interrupted career.

24. Secondly, the correlation between income and poverty is also different for men and women. While many women have an income that is quite large enough to avoid poverty, they are not sure of enjoying it, not least because of cultural, traditional and family relations that oblige them to give their income to the head of household, who then decides how it will be used. Besides, very often women will use their income for their families first: food for their husbands and children, education for their children, etc. It is not uncommon to see undernourished women in households that should not be suffering poverty.

25. Lastly, for leaving poverty, the labour market is not always the ideal solution. Women's jobs are too often badly paid and the conditions are poor. We need only think of free zones, in which firms are often exempted from existing labour standards and where women have to combine a long working day with tiring household chores. In other cases, they will have access to part-time work only and will not earn enough to escape poverty. In these two cases, the main problem is less lack of access to the labour market than discrimination within it. It is therefore gender inequality that is the source of poverty.

26. On top of this, women's domestic work – which is up to 50% more than that performed by men<sup>16</sup> is unpaid labour that does not even entitle them to economic and/or social security benefits despite the vital nature of this reproductive work for economic growth and social reproduction. Poverty among women is therefore a problem that transcends their specific material shortcomings and is bound up with their overall social status in our societies.

## 2.1 Changes in social policies: a paradigm shift

27. In 1990 the World Bank put poverty back on the policy agenda. In 1995 poverty eradication was announced as a priority objective for development co-operation, and World Bank policy strategies – together with those of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – were adjusted accordingly in 1999. Poverty eradication was adopted as the United Nations' first millennium development goal in 2000.

28. In the EU, the Commission was compelled to set aside its anti-poverty programmes in the 1990s following a dispute concerning their legal basis.<sup>17</sup> Consequently there are no 'poverty' provisions in EU treaties, which refer only to 'social exclusion' and only in policy documents such as the 2000 Lisbon process<sup>18</sup> and the Europe 2020 programme of 2010.<sup>19</sup>

14 Van Lancker, W., 'Effects of poverty on the living and working conditions of women and their children' in European Parliament, *Main Causes of Female Poverty*, Workshop for the FEMM Committee, 2015, p. 13.

15 Chant, S., *Gender, Generation and Poverty. Exploring the 'Feminisation of Poverty' in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2007, p. 113.

16 UNDP, *Human Development Report 1995*, New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.

17 Pochet, P., 'The Open Method of Co-ordination and the Construction of Social Europe: A Historical Perspective' in Zeitlin, J. et al., *The Open Method of Co-ordination in Action: The European Employment and Social Inclusion Strategies*, Brussels, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2005.

18 Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, *Presidency Conclusions*.

19 Brussels European Council, 17 June 2010, *Presidency Conclusions*.



29. If we study what the institutions have been saying, we can see a gradual but definite shift away from social protection and towards poverty reduction. While the World Bank has been quite explicit about this policy approach,<sup>20</sup> the European institutions have been much more reticent. This is above all due to their powers: the only way they can influence social policy is through policy and legislation on the internal market within the scope of economic governance and the country-specific recommendations issued by the Commission.<sup>21</sup> Nowadays social policies are always defined within the scope of austerity policy, both nationally and at EU level. This has led to cuts in unemployment benefits, a higher retirement age, and privatisation of retirement schemes and a number of public services. The shift from social security to poverty reduction policies is becoming more and more pronounced<sup>22 23</sup> and is not confined to EU member states.

30. At present, social policies are focusing more and more on social investment, i.e. developing human capital, active inclusion of individuals outside the job market, and social innovation, with varying consequences in terms of social rights.

31. These developments are particularly significant for women, who are more dependent than men on services provided by public authorities to accommodate their role in the labour market to their role in the family.

32. These various factors amply justify an individual approach to poverty among women, even if the idea of 'feminisation' of poverty raises as many questions as it answers. Poverty among women is not the same as poverty among men. The processes involved in entering and leaving it are different for each and require specific measures.

33. This report does not aim to be exhaustive; it confines itself to highlighting factors which are particularly relevant to local and regional anti-poverty policies.

### III. LOCAL GOVERNMENT TOOLS AND MECHANISMS

#### 3.1. Devolved powers

34. No general comments can be made about local government powers for combating poverty, since they differ according to the constitutional system of the country concerned.

35. These powers may stem from a federal system in which the federated states are given specific powers, either exclusive or shared, in various fields. They may also stem from devolution, whereby central government delegates certain tasks to regions and municipalities. In addition, local and regional authorities can always complement the work of the central government and take specific initiatives in fields of their choosing, provided they receive concomitant financing for such projects.

36. Virtually all local and regional authorities have social responsibilities, whether for education, health, housing, public transport or social assistance. In most cases these fields cover the human rights laid down in constitutions or international legal instruments for human rights. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has already stated its position on the role of local government in implementing human rights.<sup>24</sup>

37. In relation to local and regional authorities' potential for taking effective action in the social field, we should not overlook the key role of cities in globalisation. They are increasingly being seen as testing grounds for new post-crisis policies and new forms of participatory governance.<sup>25</sup> Being in direct contact with citizens' everyday life, they can also have an international role and facilitate types of co-operation that may

20 World Bank, *World Development Report 1997: The State in a Changing World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997.

21 European Commission, *Economic governance*, accessed on 14 March 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/economic\\_governance/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/economic_governance/index_en.htm)

22 Vanhercke, B., 'Is the "Social dimension of Europe 2020" an oxymoron?' in Degryse, C. et al., *Social Developments in the European Union 2010*, Brussels, OSE and ETUI.

23 Council of Europe, *Conference on the future of the protection of social rights in Europe*, background paper, Belgian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, 2015.

[http://www.coe.int/T/DGHL/Monitoring/SocialCharter/Background\\_Paper\\_DEF\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/DGHL/Monitoring/SocialCharter/Background_Paper_DEF_EN.pdf)

24 Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, *Role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of human rights*, Recommendation 280 (2010) Revised, 2011.

25 Sassen, S., *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006.

be harder to implement at national level.<sup>26</sup> It is not unreasonable to say that municipalities have a leading part to play in sustainable development.

38. Of course, this potential will depend on the resources available to local and regional authorities. Here fiscal autonomy and/or income transfers from central government will be decisive.

### 3.2. Social action by local and regional authorities

39. In some states there is friction between nationally organised social security on the one hand and locally organised social assistance on the other. Given the paradigm shift referred to in Section 2.1 above, it is obvious that the role of local and regional authorities in assisting people in poverty is becoming more important by the day. Through their contact with the latter's everyday life, their knowledge of the social and economic situation on the ground and their proximity to civil society associations, local and regional authorities are particularly well placed to match social provision to actual demand.

40. It is worth emphasising two key points about social policy at local level. Firstly, it will not be successful if the government does not approach the issue from a multi-level governance point of view, sharing the decision-making and implementation responsibilities. It is therefore advisable to look for synergies and avoid not only duplication and fragmentation but also transfer of responsibilities without transfer of the requisite resources. Secondly, it will also fail if it does not go beyond short-term projects and take a structural approach capable of providing long-term protection from poverty.

### 3.3. Social innovation

41. The relatively new concept of 'social innovation' offers considerable potential for local social action, with both advantages and drawbacks. The concept was introduced by social forces acting locally to strengthen social cohesion and restore solidarity within the community. The aim is to spur citizens to take matters into their own hands and organise the services they feel they need.

42. The idea has been taken up by the EU in its Europe 2020 programme.<sup>27</sup> For the EU, social innovations have been defined as 'social both in their ends and in their means [...] new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations'. These innovations are not only good for society but also enhance society's capacity to act. The European Commission distinguishes between three categories of innovation: grassroots innovations from members of society themselves; a broader level blurring social and economic boundaries; and 'systemic innovations, which fundamentally change attitudes and values'.<sup>28</sup>

43. The concept of social innovation opens up new avenues for co-operation between local authorities and civil society. It has been a great success in a large number of cities, especially in Belgium and the Netherlands, and early analysis has confirmed its considerable potential as well as its possible risks. These include two in particular. Firstly, while citizens may indeed take matters into their own hands and organise the services they need, social innovation cannot be an alternative to failing public authorities where social services are concerned. The work performed by the public will be voluntary work, and it is obvious that, although it will consist in care, once again it is women who will be doing it. Secondly, there is the risk of hierarchical and/or exclusive communities that do not respect fundamental human rights. Moreover, evaluations from the Netherlands show that the best initiatives are taken in co-operation with local councils. Placing care in the hands of communities or making families once again responsible must be avoided.

44. There are considerable advantages to a co-operative approach and countless ways in which local councils can assist the community, including women in poverty in their action: small grants, professional know-how, meeting places, bookkeeping assistance, assistance for setting up co-operatives, specification of safety standards and provision of equipment.

45. As for the initiatives themselves, the only limits are the imagination and creativity of the communities concerned: nurseries, language classes, training, car-sharing, housing, group buying, school meals, etc. All these initiatives can generate income and jobs, especially for women.

<sup>26</sup> World Economic Forum, *Everybody's Business: Strengthening International Cooperation in a More Interdependent World, Report of the Global Redesign Initiative*, Geneva, WEF, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Brussels European Council 17 June 2010, *Presidency Conclusions*.

<sup>28</sup> European Commission, *Strengthening social innovation in Europe*, Brussels, 2012.

## IV. THE VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY AMONG WOMEN

### 4.1. Poverty and women's human rights

46. Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of human rights violations.<sup>29</sup> If we want to eradicate poverty, this means that we have to consider human rights.

47. A number of legal instruments may serve as references starting with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which provides that 'everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security (Article 22) and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which provides an exhaustive list of the rights to be respected, protected and implemented by individual countries and through international co-operation.

48. The most specific one, however, is the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which provides, in its Article 3 that 'States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men'. Article 11 thereof specifies the right to social security, a pension and social services.

49. Among Council of Europe legal instruments, the 1996 Revised European Social Charter reaffirms the right to social security and social assistance (Articles 12 and 13) and to protection against poverty and social exclusion (Article 30).

50. On top of these legal instruments, which have been ratified by virtually all Council of Europe member states, in the Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by consensus at the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, member states reaffirmed their commitment to 'the equal rights and inherent human dignity of women and men' and to 'ensure the full implementation of the human rights of women' (paragraphs 8 and 9). Paragraph 14 reiterates that 'women's rights are human rights'. The Platform for Action focuses on poverty in its first strategic objective.<sup>30</sup> The United Nations is marking the 20th anniversary of this conference in 2015.

51. In 2012 the United Nations Human Rights Council confirmed the primacy of human rights over government austerity measures. Likewise, the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) confirmed that Greece had to comply with the European Social Charter. The constitutional courts of Latvia, Lithuania and Portugal have also compelled their governments to uphold constitutional standards in the field of social and economic rights.<sup>31 32</sup>

52. It is worth emphasising these principles inasmuch as current austerity policies too often result in a dismantling of social services, extreme flexibility of labour law (zero-hour contracts in the United Kingdom), power disconnections (in Greece, for example), violation of the right to housing (in Spain), etc. These measures inevitably affect the weakest and most vulnerable members of society, with women in the forefront.

53. In Belgium, the decree of 12 May 2004 on local social policy states that the aim of social assistance legislation is to safeguard more effectively for all citizens the fundamental rights laid down in the Constitution. To this end, the local institutions concerned (Public Centres for Social Welfare) receive additional resources from city or municipal councils where necessary. However, the Flemish government recently decided to make these institutions part of local government, which might jeopardise this safeguarding of rights because of changing political majorities.

<sup>29</sup> Sepulveda, M. and Nyst, C., *The Human Rights Approach to Social Protection*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, Erweko Oy, 2012, p.17.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing, 1995, A/CONF.171/13.

<sup>31</sup> Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, *Safeguarding human rights in times of economic crisis*, Strasbourg, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Council of Europe, *Conference on the future of the protection of social rights in Europe*, background paper, Belgian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, 2015:

[http://www.coe.int/T/DGHL/Monitoring/SocialCharter/Background\\_Paper\\_DEF\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/DGHL/Monitoring/SocialCharter/Background_Paper_DEF_EN.pdf)

## 4.2. Poverty and the right to gender equality

54. Gender equality is a basic human-rights requirement and a cornerstone of democracy. For this reason, international organisations and the great majority of their member states are seeking to advance it through a myriad of specific measures.

55. The principle that has long been promoted, including by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, is gender mainstreaming, defined as ‘the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making’.<sup>33</sup>

56. This principle was also confirmed by the UN in the Platform for Action adopted at the 1995 Beijing Conference. Gender mainstreaming is undoubtedly the best way of promoting gender equality. However, it is also clear that for women living in poverty, some policy areas are more relevant than others. While the legal status of women has undergone a remarkable improvement over the past few decades, it is regrettable that discrimination still exists and explains in large part why women are so vulnerable to poverty.

57. Among the areas that come first to mind are women’s labour-force participation rate, pay, and retirement pensions. To improve their access to (and position in terms of) social rights, it is also desirable that they should engage more in politics locally, nationally and globally. Women’s empowerment, particularly in the economic and financial fields, is directly dependent on it.

58. As regards women’s participation rate in the labour force, the gender gap is only about 6% in Northern Europe (Nordic and Baltic countries) as against 31% in Malta and 43% in Turkey.<sup>34</sup> Too often, women are in part-time, informal and insecure employment, which helps to explain their lower incomes, this status being the consequence of a lower level of education because they have had to look after their young children. Last but not least, traditional and cultural stereotypes still exist in our societies.

59. In most member States of the ECE (UN) the gender pay gap is above 15%. While pay is invariably lower in female-dominated sectors, it should be noted that, even for domestic work, women are paid less than men (male janitors, for example, are better paid than maids and female housecleaners).<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere, the gender gap may be diminishing, not because the situation of women is improving but because that of men is getting worse.

60. Another noteworthy gap is that between mothers and women without dependent children in the labour market. This gap is limited where there is only one child, but with two or three it cannot be viewed other than as a penalty of motherhood.<sup>36</sup>

61. Lastly, specifically because of incomplete or interrupted careers, combined with lower pay, retirement pensions are in many cases not enough to save women from poverty, and the gender gap in EU countries is as much as 39%.<sup>37</sup>

62. These breaches of equality and social and economic rights show that women are indeed much more vulnerable than men and are likely to remain trapped in poverty. Men are just as vulnerable if they work part-time or have insecure employment. However, discrimination against women and their lower pay make them particularly subject to poverty.

63. The lack of equality between women in poverty and men in poverty is coupled with another inequality: It is striking to see in much that is said concerning poverty among women that, (poor) women are expected to contribute to social cohesion by helping to organise social services, work in prevention of delinquency among children or of drug abuse and street violence, etc.<sup>38</sup> In Europe today, there is a tendency to expect from women both ‘re-productive’ work at home and services formerly provided by the (social) state. One

33 Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, *Gender mainstreaming at local and regional level: a strategy to promote equality between women and men in cities and regions*, report by Ms B.M. Lövgren, 2004.

34 United Nations Economic and Social Council, Economic Commission for Europe, *Gender-sensitive economic and social policies to support the empowerment of women and girls in the ECE region*, Doc. ECE/AC.28/2014/5, 22 August 2014.

35 Ibid.

36 Grimshaw, D. and Rubery, J., *The Motherhood Pay Gap*, Geneva, ILO, 2015.

37 United Nations Economic and Social Council, Economic Commission for Europe, *Gender-sensitive economic and social policies to support the empowerment of women and girls in the ECE region*, Doc. ECE/AC.28/2014/5, 22 August 2014.

38 Mestrum, F., ‘Femmes pauvres et biens publics’, *Chronique Féministe*, No. 71/72, February/May 2000.

could say that in the strategies conceived to fight women's poverty, women are both part of the means as well as the end goal.

64. Local and regional authorities have an important role to play, since there are a number of ways of promoting and measuring gender equality: (temporary) positive discrimination policies, certification of businesses with an equality policy, clauses in public procurement contracts to encourage such businesses, incentives for women to pursue careers in science and technology, income supplements for paternity leave, automatic enforcement of social rights to avoid failure to exercise them, etc.

65. In 2006 the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), a European association of national associations from 41 countries, adopted a 'European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life', which has now been ratified by over a thousand municipalities. Its website gives copious examples of good practice.

### 4.3. Effects of the economic crisis

66. The economic crisis has had a significant impact on member states' budgets and especially their social expenditure. Initially, social spending rose in response to the crisis, before declining from 2009/2010. Although social expenditure appears to have grown as a percentage of GDP (gross domestic product), in many cases this must be put down to a fall in GDP over the same period.<sup>39</sup>

67. Poverty has increased substantially, particularly in EU countries. It is estimated that 24.5% of the EU population is at risk of poverty. Income poverty affects 17% of the population and severe material deprivation 9.6%.<sup>40</sup> Austerity measures should not infringe citizens' social and economic rights, and regressive measures are proscribed.

68. Women are particularly hard hit by the crisis, owing, on the one hand, to unemployment and labour market conditions and, on the other, to a dismantling of the social services on which they are so much more dependent than men.

69. Many more women than men work in 'atypical' sectors (part-time work, temporary work, employment without a contract, etc.), which are those with the lowest pay. If these women are heads of households with dependent children, they cannot escape poverty. Even a full-time job with the minimum wage is not enough for single mothers: of all the EU countries, it is only in the Czech Republic, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom that they are able to escape poverty.<sup>41</sup>

70. As for social services, they are far from adequate and often too expensive. In many countries, nurseries are not available to children of mothers who are unemployed (and who, as a result, cannot attend interviews, for example). In Russia, nursery places are not available to children below the age of three: mothers are paid only for a year and a half leaving them without the means to ensure child-care assistance during a period of a year and a half.

71. In most countries pursuing austerity policies, education, health, public transport and housing services have suffered drastic cuts. Too often, women do not have the resources to procure such services on the private market.<sup>42</sup> In Spain close on a million people have lost access to healthcare. It is therefore essential to provide women living in poverty, in particular, with free healthcare, reproductive health-care services (such as maternal and newborn health; family planning; prevention of unsafe abortion; management of infections and diseases including HIV/AIDS) being a priority.

72. The only remaining solution is often 'do-it-yourself', i.e. provision by the women themselves, as far as possible, of the services that they are lacking. However woeful this solution might appear at first sight, it is nevertheless promising for the future and for social policy at local level, since if women organise themselves, municipalities have numerous options for assisting them: grants for premises, training, professional assistance, etc. Of course, nothing prevents local and regional authorities from themselves organising the

39 OECD, *Social Spending after the Crisis*, 2012.

40 Eurostat, *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion*, March 2014.

41 Van Lancker, W., 'Effects of poverty on the living and working conditions of women and their children', in European Parliament, *Main Causes of Female Poverty*, Workshop for the FEMM Committee, 2015, p. 26

42 United Nations, *Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*, UN Women, New York, 2014, pp. 51-52.

services that national authorities have ceased to provide or subsidise. A case to be avoided is that of public or private firms that dismiss their female staff in order to take them on again as self-employed workers.

73. Solutions can be found to prevent women from having to seek much more serious solutions such as life on the streets, even with their children, recourse to prostitution, or emigration. Local and regional authorities have a great responsibility in this field. Inasmuch as the poverty caused by the crisis is 'new' poverty, they must ensure that it does not turn into generational poverty, that people in poverty do not become homeless and live on the streets with their children, and that a 'culture of poverty' does not develop. This will also help to avoid the high costs of subsequent reintegration.

#### 4.4. Social protection and women in poverty

74. In most of our countries, social security – a system essentially based on insurance for life's uncertainties and misfortunes (illness, workplace injury, unemployment) and for old age – is reserved for the working population. Although, initially, non-working women had 'derived' rights, nowadays most rights have become personal. However, problems remain, especially for retirement pensions.

75. Another feature of our social protection systems is the distinction between this insurance system for working people and a separate system of social assistance for people not in the labour market and without sufficient resources to live in dignity. The latter include children and senior citizens in particular, but also people with chronic disease or disabilities. Social security systems are usually a national responsibility, whereas social assistance schemes come under local and/or regional authorities.

76. Social security systems faced gender criticism as early as the 1980s.<sup>43</sup> These systems usually took the nuclear family as their reference point, the father being the breadwinner and the mother performing the domestic work. The dominant economic system at the time failed to take account, both conceptually and in terms of calculations, of the reproductive work performed by women in the home.

77. The situation nowadays is very different. Firstly, women are present in the labour market in large numbers whilst still responsible for reproductive work. Secondly, it is women in poverty, from both home and abroad, who provide assistance for middle- and upper-class women in looking after their children and households. Lastly, the number of single mothers has risen appreciably, creating an increased risk of poverty because of the multiple demands on such women and the inadequacy of their incomes.

78. The fact is that because of their position in or outside the labour market and the multiple demands on them, the majority of single mothers have need of social assistance. Their income depends on social transfers much more than men's.<sup>44</sup> As social security systems are increasingly dismantled, it is important to put in place universally accessible minimum income schemes.<sup>45</sup> Single mothers are subject to all sorts of means-testing on any income they may have, are penalised if they co-habit (entailing a cut in their allowances) and are therefore once again disempowered economically and financially. In EU countries, social assistance for single mothers is not enough to rescue them from poverty, except in Denmark and Ireland.<sup>46</sup>

79. Activation policies have now been put in place, including in the shape of vocational training. This is a highly positive development, provided, of course, that solutions are found to existing problems for women in poverty: childcare, housing, public transport and the position of women in the labour market. By way of illustration, we need only think of the woman who cannot apply for a vacancy unless accompanied by her three children, the women who have to work just when their children are coming out of school or going to bed (office cleaners, for example, or supermarket check-out staff), and the women who have to work late and have long and sometimes dangerous journeys back home to the suburbs.

80. This is another field in which local and regional authorities can play a key role, firstly by co-ordinating with national authorities to prevent social security spending being cut if citizens subsequently have to apply for social assistance at local level (which is what has happened in Belgium, with the cancellation of some

43 Williams, F., *Social Policy: A Critical Introduction: Issues of Race, Gender and Class*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989.

44 Perrons, D., 'The effects of the crisis on female poverty' in European Parliament, *Main Causes of Female Poverty*, Workshop for the FEMM Committee, 2015, p. 53.

45 European Commission, *Toward adequate and accessible Minimum Income Schemes in Europe*, EMIN, Brussels, 2015.

46 Van Lancker, W., 'Effects of poverty on the living and working conditions of women and their children' in European Parliament, *Main Causes of Female Poverty*, Workshop for the FEMM Committee, 2015.

unemployment benefits), secondly by introducing non-penalising activation policies for women in poverty, and thirdly by examining the actual transport and housing situation of women in poverty in their areas.

#### 4.5. Women and sustainable development

81. Climate change is now a direct threat to life on our planet, and we know that its adverse effects are felt much more by vulnerable individuals and communities – including women. According to the United Nations, women are much more at risk of dying from a natural disaster than are men, the reason once again being their marginalised social position and lack of power.<sup>47</sup>

82. However, we are now aware that the solutions to climate problems also involve women, whether for managing household waste, reducing household pollution or providing access to safe food. There are more and more synergies between gender equality and economic sustainability. For example, it is more than likely that if women were to have more voice in public administration, there would be greater investment in children's health, nutrition and relevant environmental measures.<sup>48</sup>

83. The problem that has to be solved is the fact that women's reproductive work in the household is seen as being external to the economic system. If women were paid for this work or if its true value were recognised, women's impact on the environment would also be more apparent. Monetisation of this work would increase GDP (up to 70%),<sup>49</sup> while the sectors in which women work are among the least polluting (care). Promotion of the care economy would in any case be a good solution for women in poverty and for society.

84. Food security is a key issue owing to its importance for women living in poverty and the role that local and regional authorities can play here. The concept refers to food production that gives priority to the needs of the population and to physical and economic access to safe and adequate food. In other words, this is a type of sustainable agriculture that could certainly be practised in cities and/or on their outskirts. This is a solution being actively promoted by 'transition' movements. While avoiding stereotyping women and their 'reproductive' work, this urban agriculture is an excellent way of helping to solve poverty by creating jobs and income and promoting sustainable development and agriculture,<sup>50</sup> especially when neither the private sector, nor the public sector gives women – often under-qualified for the technology sector – real employment opportunities.

85. Urban agriculture needs to be understood in the context of the development of social and solidarity economy. It does not only focus on women, but thanks to its philosophy and flexibility, it often provides more employment opportunities to women. Various examples of urban agriculture are already in existence, although not necessarily focusing on women in poverty. Their distinguishing feature is direct control by citizens themselves and they are a natural answer for citizens living in poverty. While people in poverty today often lack the resources to buy safe food, they probably have the means to produce it themselves. If women decide to engage in these activities, this would empower them economically and allow use of otherwise neglected knowledge. Likewise, it could help the women whose partner has emigrated and who therefore has been left alone. The public authorities have an obvious role to play in providing waste ground, making small grants for purchase of seed and equipment, organising markets, etc.

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47 United Nations, *Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*, UN Women, New York, 2014.

48 Ibid.

49 UNPD, *Human Development Report 1995*, New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.

50 Boulianne, M., 'L'agriculture urbaine au sein des jardins collectifs québécois. *Empowerment des femmes ou "domestication de l'espace public"*, *Erudit*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2001:

<http://www.erudit.org/revue/as/2001/v25/n1/000210ar.pdf>.

#### 4.6. Women and migration

86. Migration flows have changed appreciably over the past few decades. While migration in the 1960s and 1970s posed no real problems owing to prompt and generally successful integration into the labour market, today's migrants to the wealthiest European countries are often economic refugees and individuals fleeing discrimination and not infrequently violence in their own countries. This is particularly true for the Roma population.

87. The earlier migrant groups (except for the older members) do not generally have any specific poverty problems. However, more recent groups are facing serious problems. We do not have any accurate data, firstly because of the above-mentioned problem of no gender-specific data for women and secondly because some countries prohibit statistics based on an individual's or household's ethnicity or culture. Yet we know that more and more women are emigrating and that flows from both Eastern and Southern Europe have increased.

88. Here cultural and religious problems often quickly come into play. Many women are relegated to the home and do not speak the language, and consequently problems of poverty go unrecorded. There follows the inevitable problem of the children growing up and being unable to talk to their parents about the problems they are encountering at school. There may also be health-related problems owing to lack of access because of the language barrier or a prohibition on consulting a doctor of the opposite sex. Frequently there is also little or no awareness of access to social services.

89. Too often social services also err through lack of knowledge, interpreting every problem they meet in terms of culture or integration. Assistance with red tape is undoubtedly useful but must be followed by a more in-depth examination of the structural causes of poverty.

90. Today self-organisation is a growing force. This should be encouraged, and it is here that local and regional authorities have a key role to play. While organisation of women from ethnic and cultural minorities is necessary to begin the integration process, these women must subsequently get to know other minorities and non-immigrant women living in poverty. In fact, their problems are the same and relate to knowledge of and access to social services and rights.

91. A multitude of tasks and responsibilities await local and regional authorities: organising language classes, providing vocational training and education in citizenship, offering courses on nutrition, etc. This work is particularly important inasmuch as problems of isolation, often compounded by growing xenophobia in our cities, are likely to produce an increasingly restrictive attitude towards women's freedom.

92. One avenue worth exploring is twinning with migrants' home cities: by providing a better knowledge of the original situation and fostering economic and business relations, co-development projects can offer satisfactory solutions for communities looking for an identity.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

93. Highlighting 'good practice' at a time when, because of austerity policies, 'bad practice' abounds and cannot help but create more poverty, borders on utopianism. Everything is considered 'excessive' or 'unfeasible'. Yet it is all a question of policy choices and combining the development of a sustainable economy with the well-being of citizens, particularly the most vulnerable among them.

94. The urgent task for local and regional authorities today is to prevent 'the new poor' – the victims of austerity policies – from falling into 'chronic' poverty, with all the attendant problems for them and their children.

95. What research into poverty over the past few decades has shown is that it is pointless to focus more and more on the poorest of the poor.<sup>51</sup> Combating women's poverty inevitably entails combating men's poverty as well and having social and economic policies that prevent impoverishment of the middle classes. Poverty, it should be pointed out, is not the problem of the people suffering it but the problem of society as a whole. It is vital to take account of the gender dimensions of poverty.

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51 UNRISD, *Combating Poverty and Inequality*, Geneva, UNRISD, 2010.



96. This is why a holistic approach that takes into account all the dimensions involved is essential.<sup>52</sup> The problem of women's poverty is much more than a gender issue, while gender issues extend well beyond the problem of poverty. Helping women is a relatively simple matter, in that it is enough to recognise the true value of their work and see them as the solution to many of our social problems rather than as victims.

97. The national authorities of the member States should adopt a multi-level governance approach coordinating the measures and delivery of services across different territorial levels. They should be made aware that, when framing macro-economic policy, they should systematically consider any consequences for human rights and especially social and economic rights. They should also take account of any consequences for social assistance at local level when making decisions on social spending. They should consider establishing statistical tools to measure women's income poverty and setting social protection floors or universal (non-contributory) minimum income schemes. Individualising all social and economic rights is another recommendation that can be made to national authorities in order to empower women.

98. There are also measures that can and should be taken by local and regional authorities in order to improve the economic situation of women. Local authorities should encourage and support women's self-organisation in order to improve provision of social services and create jobs and income. Local authorities could offer free reproductive healthcare to women in poverty, promote the care economy (personal assistance, etc.) whilst recognising the value of women's work and promote urban agriculture to improve food security while creating jobs and income. Finally, one interesting approach to be explored is the possibility of an "automatic" application of social and economic rights to avoid failure to exercise them.

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<sup>52</sup> Stratigaki, M., 'The positive impact of a gender-sensitive approach to the fight against poverty' in European Parliament, *Main Causes of Female Poverty*, Workshop for the FEMM Committee, 2015.