

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 391 (2015)¹ Fighting the increasing poverty of women: the responsibility of local and regional authorities

1. The Council of Europe actively supports the idea of a right to protection from poverty, particularly through its European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No.163) on the basis of the understanding that poverty is not only the problem of the people suffering from it but also 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 measures to counter this development. PACE also put forward measures for combating poverty and called on member States to tackle “the root causes of women’s poverty” in its Resolution 1800 (2011) and Recommendation 1963 (2011) on combating poverty.

3. The Commissioner for Human Rights in his Issue Paper, *Safeguarding human rights in times of economic crisis* (2014), recommended that member States conduct impact assessments of social and economic policies and budgets on human rights and equality, that they promote equality, and that they 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, thus 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 measures taken by 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 to uphold human rights and counter 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 restrictions based on religion or belief (such as the prohibition on consulting a doctor of the opposite sex);

b. adopt a multilevel governance approach that aims to coordinate the elaboration and implementation of measures across different territorial levels while 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 living 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);

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 usefulness of exchanging good practices in order to be able to make pertinent policy choices and combine 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 administrations;

h. consider promoting urban agriculture in the context of the development of a social economy and one based on solidarity, so as 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 so as to avoid situations in which individuals are unable to exercise them, particularly for women whose access to such rights may be limited.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 21 October 2015, 2nd Sitting (see [Document CG/2015\(29\)9FINAL](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Jean-Louis Testud, France (L, EPP/CCE).