

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 154 (2004)¹ on fighting severe poverty in towns: the role of local authorities

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Chamber of Local Authorities,

1. Having considered the report on the role of local authorities in the fight against extreme poverty in towns and cities, drawn up on the basis of a questionnaire sent to several thousand local authorities in the member states of the Council of Europe, and having regard to this report;
2. Recalling its Resolution 243 (1993) on citizenship and extreme poverty: the Charleroi Declaration;
3. Bearing in mind:
 - a. Recommendation Rec(2003)19 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on improving access to social rights, and in particular paragraphs 9, 10, 14.3, and indents 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 15, 27 and 37 of the appendix to the recommendation;
 - b. Recommendation No. R (93) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on effective access to law and to justice for the very poor;
 - c. the report of the Parliamentary Assembly's Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee (Doc. 7981 (1998)) on fighting social exclusion and strengthening social cohesion in Europe;
 - d. Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1196 (1992) on severe poverty and social exclusion: towards guaranteed minimum levels of resources;
 - e. the Revised European Social Charter, particularly Article 30, which establishes everyone's right to protection against poverty and social exclusion;
4. Considering that:
 - a. local authorities, in particular cities and medium-sized towns, are directly affected by extreme poverty;
 - b. local authorities frequently address the issue of combating extreme poverty in partnership with the voluntary social sector, including the various charities, and, in some cases, with the support of the private sector;
 - c. the majority of the action taken is aimed at single women, the long-term unemployed or those whose income is insufficient; the children of these families; migrants experiencing problems; those on the margins of society; and the elderly who receive no pension;

5. Believing, none the less, that:

- a. many local authorities in Europe, although faced with the problem of extreme urban poverty, are unable or do not have the resources without state aid to take action in this field;
- b. those local authorities which do take action often limit themselves to emergency measures such as food distribution and the ad hoc provision of accommodation rather than implement longer-term policies;
- c. the effectiveness of local policies to combat extreme urban poverty appears to suffer from a lack of co-ordination and monitoring of the action undertaken and from inadequate publicising of the relevant information;
- d. the opportunity for towns and cities to draw on practices already implemented in other local authorities could represent a considerable saving in time and energy, and could in addition avoid their embarking on action which could ultimately prove to be ineffective,

6. Recommends that the member states of the Council of Europe:

- a. ensure that local authorities are given the specific financial assistance necessary to alleviate temporarily the sufferings of human beings unable to satisfy their essential needs;
- b. above and beyond macro-economic measures in the field of employment for the most vulnerable sections of society, place greater emphasis on economic integration through what is known as the third sector or the social economy, as a prime means of contributing to the fight against extreme poverty;
- c. attach special attention to the question of housing – insofar as it is a factor of both social and occupational integration and an essential measure – and in particular prevent eviction, in whatever form, through appropriate legislation and regulation, increase the availability of low-rent accommodation not only in towns and cities, but also in rural areas to avoid an exodus towards urban centres;

7. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

- a. encourage the member states of the Council of Europe to consider themselves effectively bound by the urgency of the “right to protection against poverty and social exclusion”, by incorporating Article 30 of the Revised European Social Charter into Part III, Article A.1.b. of the said Charter;
- b. accordingly, to encourage member states, in consultation with the local authorities, to draw up national strategies to reduce extreme urban poverty comprising measures to promote the effective access of persons who are, or run the risk of being, in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, and their families, to employment, housing, training, education, culture, and social and medical assistance;

c. consider the issue of extreme urban poverty as one which should be included on the agenda of the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, which could discuss an action plan in this area;

8. Recommends that the Liaison Committee of INGOs enjoying participatory status with the Council of Europe:

a. encourage national and international organisations in the voluntary sector engaged in the fight against extreme poverty to pursue their efforts and action on the ground,

together with and in addition to action taken by local and regional authorities;

b. study the possibility of setting up an appropriate form of monitoring to keep watch on the positive effects of action taken at local level.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 26 May 2004 and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 27 May 2004, (see Document CPL (11) 5, draft recommendation presented by E. Tobler (Switzerland, L, NR), rapporteur).