

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Resolution 182 (2004)<sup>1</sup> 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 local and regional authorities of the member states of the Council of Europe:

*a.* in general:

*i.* promote the principle of one-stop services and simplify the administrative formalities to enable the disadvantaged to have effective access to the rights enshrined in European texts and those of the countries in which they live;

*ii.* conclude agreements with companies providing basic amenities (electricity, water) to ensure that they do not cut off the supply of these essential resources in cases where people find themselves in financial hardship;

*iii.* deal with people who contact social welfare services in a receptive manner and consider them for who they are, not for their material worth or for what they have become, listen to them with greater concern and seek to help them gain control of their lives, whatever the extent of exclusion with which they are confronted;

*iv.* devise procedures to assess the measures taken, in order to improve on them or replace them with others;

*v.* involve the people finding themselves in a situation of extreme poverty for whom such measures are intended, by devising the appropriate mechanisms for consultation;

*vi.* oversee the co-ordination of measures taken by the voluntary sector, the business sector and the various public and private authorities;

*b.* in the field of employment and training:

*i.* encourage contacts between employers (informed about and alerted to the specific needs of the people in question) and those in a situation of extreme poverty (having been unemployed for a considerable length of time) seeking step by step to resume a working life;

*ii.* plan municipal innovations in terms of human factors and jobs (which despite being socially very worthwhile are

often viewed as undemanding or low-skill) rather than seek to make the town or city a commercial enterprise;

iii. support training initiatives put forward by humanitarian organisations and associations in order to match more closely the skills of the long-term unemployed to the needs of the local environment;

c. in the field of emergency shelter, housing and humanitarian aid:

i. put forward solutions for emergency accommodation offering decent sleeping conditions and possibilities for personal hygiene;

ii. promote access to housing via intermediary associations which offer guarantees to landlords and assume responsibility for managing rental arrangements for the homeless;

iii. support local initiatives encouraging residents to become involved through the collection and distribution of food, organisation of meals and the provision of meeting places offering a pleasant and sociable environment;

iv. arrange for home help (material, food, medical care, etc) for elderly people living alone who receive only very little old-age pension, in order to avoid their being placed unnecessarily in an institution for the elderly, which is a sign of a society having lost its capacity for maintaining a sense of community and, therefore, social cohesion;

v. assist minorities wishing to settle by helping them find suitable housing;

d. in the field of education and health:

i. encourage educational initiatives (at school, at home, on the street) for the children of families experiencing extreme poverty, in order to reduce to the maximum the effects of such hardship (violence, alcoholism, petty crime, etc.) and so that these children do not in turn end up in the same unfortunate situation as their parents;

ii. enable voluntary workers to be given training to improve their ability to work with children, especially as regards combating illiteracy;

iii. take steps to bring about better recognition of minorities by the majority population;

iv. ensure children develop appropriately and in good health by increasing the number of care structures and free medical facilities;

v. take educational initiatives to promote gender equality, as it is well known that the impressions gained by children at a very early age can have a high and lasting impact;

7. Calls on the Congress Committee on Social Cohesion:

a. to implement the principles contained in the present resolution in its future activities;

b. to devise a monitoring instrument, possibly in the form of a simplified analysis grid, which will provide the Congress on a regular basis with a picture of developments in the situation of extreme poverty in the towns and cities of Europe.

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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 resolution presented by E. Tobler (Switzerland, L, NR), rapporteur).