

Open space

Family and reconciliation policies

The main conclusion of this meeting is that you need both general and targeted measures to solve problems of poverty, and that empowerment is key to breaking the vicious circle. The group presented two case studies.

The **Flemish Network of Associations of People Experiencing Poverty** (represented here by Samira Castermans and Josse Sterckx) groups some 45 associations of people experiencing poverty, and these people are central actors in the network.

They recently held a forum to hear people in poverty giving their thoughts on how to tackle child poverty, and have put together policy advice for the Flemish government. Their conclusions include improving living conditions and guaranteeing a right to family life. In Flanders, families in poverty may see their children taken into child protection services. This doesn't reflect their parenting abilities. What they actually need is tailor-made family support.

The second topic looked at how the **Veneto Region** in Italy uses family policies as a way of tackling poverty and social exclusion. Elena Curtopassi spoke about the region's progressive policies that have 800 families in 60 networks supporting people in need. Veneto has a large immigrant population: 80,000 minors of foreign origin at last count. "It is essential to understand the causes of poverty," she explains, "and the importance of social relationships."

These families will offer to host single parents, non-accompanied minors, women who have experienced violence, disabled children, or a person who has just lost his or her job. In some cases, a family will help another family. "The support is purely of a social nature," Curtopassi

says. "It may be about helping a child do his homework. This is about organising networks of social relationships."

Veneto's regional administration also hands out "family labels" to museums, restaurants, or any company that has done something towards family policy.