

WORKING TOGETHER TO DESIGN AND BUILD A EUROPE WITHOUT POVERTY AND EXCLUSION

PROPOSALS MADE BY ATD FOURTH WORLD (ALL TOGETHER IN DIGNITY)

AT a time when the European Parliament and Commission are just about to start a new five year term of office, what is the verdict of the people living in the most difficult situations? The opinion of Clara from Spain, whose house was demolished last year and who now lives in with her family in a lorry, is clear: "The

"Living in poverty and in extreme poverty is not only an inhuman form of treatment, but it is also degrading and, in some ways, could even be termed to be a form of torture. In these conditions, human dignity is at stake".

**Françoise Tulkens,
former judge and Vice-President
of the European
Court of Human Rights.**

European states have failed families and the poorest members of society". Her view is shared by many others experiencing similar troubles. However, the European Union has defined the objectives it hopes to achieve in its fight against

poverty in its 2020 Strategy as well as adopting a number of recommendations in this area. But, despite these initiatives, extreme poverty continues to exist. It is almost as if one part of the population is surplus to requirements and counts for absolutely nothing. This waste of human lives has an extremely violent impact on those who have to endure it, representing a gross violation of human rights. Across Europe, many families and individuals are being deprived of their means of existence, expelled from their homes and forced to live in conditions in which they are criminalised and penalised. The values of peace and respect for human dignity and human rights, which are at the very heart of the European project - as well as the constitutions of many Member States - are being blatantly disregarded. People living in conditions of extreme poverty not only suffer from a lack of income, but also encounter major difficulties in gaining access to fundamental and indivisible rights.

Emergency responses (the distribution of food parcels, temporary housing etc.) do not represent a real solution. The prevailing economic and financial approach at world

At a time when many European citizens are asking challenging questions about Europe, a group of people living in a situation of poverty and social exclusion set out to gain a better understanding of what Europe is doing to ensure that life improves for the most vulnerable members of society. Over several months, they worked in partnership with others who were prepared to stand in solidarity with them, including people who held positions of responsibility at the European level. Centring their discussions around contributions based on the life experiences of people living in poverty, they prepared themselves in order to be able to enter into dialogue with European members of Parliament and officials. On 5 March 2014, at the European Fourth World People's University, held in the European Parliament in Brussels, they were given the opportunity to do so. This remarkable meeting, which was attended by 17 delegations from 10 different countries, was organised with the support of the Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Parliamentary Intergroup. The meeting made it possible to build bridges between people who would not normally meet one another. They were able to think and talk together and to draft proposals designed to ensure that the eradication of extreme poverty and the fight against inequality are at the heart of the European project.

level is based on a use of the planet's resources which is not viable. This approach continues to create a situations of social exclusion and poverty, situations which are growing worse in Europe. Faced with these observations, we, as a group of people engaged in the fight against extreme poverty, wish to work together to collectively design and build a different Europe, in which each and every person can live in dignity and in harmony with one another and the environment. We wish to contribute to the development of an economy which is at the service of everyone and which does not waste the intelligence or the know-how of any member of society. We want to place human beings and human rights once again at the heart of the European project.

*"Aid is just charity given out to the poor and is something which keeps them in their present situation. We are not fighting for aid; we are fighting for the right to be able to both access and to enjoy our rights".**

* The majority of the quotations in this document come from statements made by people living in poverty and are taken from the preparatory work and the discussions which took place during 2014 European Fourth World People's University.

MAKING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS EFFECTIVE

A PREREQUISITE: THE RIGHT TO EXIST BEFORE THE LAW

MANY people in Europe do not enjoy recognition of their existence, even though this right is protected by article 16 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which affirms the right to recognition before the law. This means that these people are not able to access any rights (participation, work, healthcare, housing, the right to vote...). They are not taken into account in statistics. This is the case for many migrants, Roma and asylum seekers, but also for those who do not have housing, who live in camps or on the streets and are effectively occupy the position of illegal immigrants in their own countries.

We call upon the European Union to guarantee the right to legal existence to all persons living on its territory.

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND TO BASIC KNOWLEDGE FOR ALL

ALL children must be allowed to learn and succeed at school without facing any form of discrimination. They must be given the same future opportunities. Far too often, children from a disadvantaged background are steered towards special education systems, sometimes as early as nursery school age.

The school drop-out rate is high amongst children living in poverty. The European Union has made the fight against early school leaving one of the main priorities of its 2020 Strategy. In order to enable all children to succeed, schools must encourage real cooperation between parents, teachers and the children themselves. However, this objective can only be achieved if the teaching staff are trained in how to dialogue with the parents.

We call upon the European Union to ensure that it commits all of the Member States to ensure that they offer an education system which provides the same opportunities and the same quality for everyone, which prevents certain children from being pushed away from the general education system at an early stage and avoids the creation of a hierarchy between the different streams of education, since these two phenomena only serve to reinforce inequalities. The necessary changes must be defined with the participation of the parents, particularly those who are the most excluded.

“Living outside in the rain or without any official papers in a state of fear, it is the same thing really”.

“Some people don't even have a right of legal existence because they are not registered anywhere, they are residing illegally in a given country or, even though they are European citizens, they have been de-registered in the place in which they are living”.

Georges de Kerchove,
Lawyer, Belgium

“In Germany certain children are often stigmatised as being ‘difficult to teach’ or as having ‘learning difficulties,’ as if this were an illness meaning that these children cannot learn”.

“There are powerful mechanisms within the school system which lead to exclusion and one of the consequences of these mechanisms is that children drop out of school.”

Sandrine Grosjean,
ChanGements pour l'égalité, a socio-pedagogical movement, Belgium

“Education is important in order to learn a trade, to get a job and housing, because if you do not have those three rights, then you have nothing at all.”



Photo Denis Gendre - ATD Fourth World

“Although European funding to combat illiteracy does exist, these projects only last one year and so after 12 months they are finished and they have to be renewed each and every time. We need something which is on-going over the longer term.”

Lesen-Schreiben,
Reading and Writing
Network, Germany

“Unemployment figures continue to rise and the people who are most affected by this are those who live in the most precarious circumstances. Furthermore, there are lots of different forms of discrimination these people are faced with when applying for a job: they may not be able to express themselves very well, they may come from a different country, they might have a disability or live in a neighbourhood or a town which has a bad reputation.”

The right to education must be fully realised for everybody. It is fundamental for each individual's life, for democracy and in order to allow everyone to play a role in society. The illiteracy rate among young people and adults in Europe continues to be very high. 75 million people in Europe do not have the skills required to function autonomously in a modern society*. Each individual should have the right to a second chance to acquire basic knowledge.

We call upon the European Union to support anti-illiteracy programmes of a sufficient length to enable all young people and adults to acquire the necessary basic knowledge and abilities.

THE RIGHT TO A DECENT JOB

A decent job is a right which responds to a fundamental human need. In today's Europe, access to decent work has become a privilege which is beyond the reach of many people.

When these people are not the victims of long-term unemployment, they find themselves trapped in undeclared work or having to accept highly precarious contracts. This makes them even more vulnerable by placing them at the very margins of the various social protection systems in place in Europe. These *junk jobs* only serve to fuel poverty and social exclusion.

Youth unemployment represents a huge challenge. Out of work young people feel increasingly excluded. For those who experience the most difficulties, lacking in both experience and qualifications, work has become an increasingly inaccessible dream. These young people must be able to access training programmes and real jobs. This should go hand in hand with high quality support services and sufficient resources to enable them to live in dignity.

As a response to these challenges, the European Union has adopted the European Commission's Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market. It has placed employment at the centre of the 2020 Strategy and has made substantial means and resources available in order to implement the European Council's recommendation the establishment of a Youth Guarantee. By signing up to this Youth Guarantee,

* Report by the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (6 September 2012)

EXTREME POVERTY: A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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the Member States are committing themselves to introduce measures to ensure that all young people up to the age of 25 are offered employment, training or a placement within four months of leaving the education system or losing their job. However, these provisions are not binding and nor do they ensure that priority is given to those who need them most.

We call upon the European Union to transform the Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee into a Directive so that it will become binding upon all of the Member States and to ensure that the guarantee plans are designed to give priority to the most vulnerable young people.

We call upon the European Union and the Member States to include the provision of high quality support in all of their employment policies in order to support individual pathways which enable each individual to successfully pursue their own projects and to gain access to a decent job. The employment services must have the human and financial resources to fulfil this mission, particularly through the provision of services to the least qualified individuals.

We call upon the European Union and the Member States to support the creation of decent jobs, particularly within local companies and initiatives, which allow people who are far removed from the labour market and have no qualifications to feel that they are playing a useful role in society by having a recognised job.

People who experience the greatest difficulties in the labour market often have skills which are not recognised because they have been acquired outside the official education and training systems. This is a huge human waste.

We call upon the European Union and the Member States to establish mechanisms to recognise skills acquired informally.

THE RIGHT TO THE MEANS REQUIRED TO LIVE A DECENT LIFE

THE current reality of those living in extreme poverty shows that fundamental rights are not guaranteed to everyone in Europe. One of the consequences of social exclusion is the shattering of family unity.

Persistent lack of housing, work or income prevents people from assuming their family, social and professional responsibilities on a long term basis. If they try to access or maintain their rights, they are faced with often insurmountable conditions and complicated and lengthy procedures.

“There is a need to monitor the quality of the placements provided, so that they represent a real opportunity for young people, rather than a means for employers to get free labour.”

“Often people do not get paid for going on a training course. If you don't have any money to feed yourself then that it is not very motivating.”

“Brigitte had an accident at the workplace, but since she was doing undeclared work, the employer did not dare to call the emergency services and she died. (...) This is a situation which is also shared by undocumented persons: the conditions in which they live mean that they have no choice other than to accept undeclared work and being exploited.”

"When you lose your home, then the institutions intervene and instead of helping you to maintain the energy and unity generated by your family, they tend to destroy and separate families (...). Once your children have been taken off you, it is almost impossible to get them back."

Under these circumstances, their daily life is reduced to a constant effort to seek out a minimum degree of security and effective access to rights which, in theory at least, are recognised in law.

"For the majority of people, basic rights are served up on a plate, whilst others have to fight tirelessly in order to access them."

The means required to live a decent life include, but are not limited to, a decent income. They are also dependent upon the possibility of accessing high quality public services at an affordable cost (social, education, health, housing, energy, water, internet). The current mind set based on speculation and the blind generation of profit, which dominates our society, only serves to exert pressure on housing, work and training and makes it very difficult for people to access them.

The European Union has implemented a certain number of initiatives in order to address these situations, including the recommendations on "Investing in Children" and on "Inclusive Action". It is essential for the European Union to ensure that the Member States implement these recommendations and that they review their results with the people they are aimed at.

We call upon the European Union to establish a directive on the means required to live a decent life for each individual, which includes a decent minimum income in all of the member countries and which takes housing costs into account.

ENSURING THE PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

IN order to ensure that the European Union is made fully aware of the infringement of rights related to extreme poverty and in order to afford better protection to the rights of the poorest members of society :

We call upon all of the Member States to ratify the European Social Charter and to accept article 30 (right to protection against poverty and social exclusion), article 31 (right to housing) and the collective complaints procedure in the short term and we call upon the European Union to ensure that it adheres to the this Charter in the medium-term.

We call for the Multi-annual Framework of the Agency for Fundamental Rights to explicitly provide for the possibility to examine cases of infringement and discrimination related to situations of extreme poverty and to ensure that the people living in these situations are involved in this process.

FOR A DEMOCRATIC EUROPE: THINKING AND FORMULATING POLICIES TOGETHER

Dialogue between the European Union and people living in extreme poverty is indispensable in order to reduce poverty in Europe. It is important to recognise these people as key political players within a democratic Europe, a Europe that would build projects designed to give universal access to all rights, without excluding anyone. Certain conditions must be put in place in order to make this partnership possible and these conditions must be assessed on a regular basis.

«The European Commission is aware that some of its many public consultations are not effective because they are too technical. The modalities, the content and the jargon used mean that they are not very accessible and the time allowed to respond to them is not sufficient. Efforts are currently being made to improve these methods of consultation.»

Brigitte Degen, European Commission official

We call upon the European Union and the Member States to create permanent spaces for reflection and dialogue with people who have experience of poverty and together with other partners. This will ensure that the people are able to contribute to the definition and evaluation of the policies that affect them.

Thinking and formulating policies together means that there is a need to take their impact upon people's lives into account. Indeed, article 9 of the Treaty of Lisbon requires the European Union to do this: "in defining and implementing its policies and actions, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health."



Photo François Philiponeau - ATD Fourth World

"We are only very rarely called upon to contribute to efforts made to seek out solutions and even when we are, in most cases we are just asked to speak about our life, rather than to contribute to the formulation of solutions. As a result, the solutions proposed very often work against us or hide the real problems."

“There is a need to make the best possible use of what the life, doubts and hopes of the poor teach us and use this as useful knowledge in the processes we adopt to shape our efforts to combat poverty in terms of both policies and action. We need to take the time to fully understand the life of the poor in all of its richness and complexity and this requires a great deal of detailed and long-term work. Rather than reality becoming part of the policies, we are talking about the policies becoming part of the reality.”

Françoise Tulkens, former judge and Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights.

“We are here in Europe and we wish to contribute to the efforts being made to build a fairer Europe.”

Belgian delegation,
Centre des demandeurs d’asile de Natoye – Natoye centre for asylum-seekers.

“The missing element is that it is difficult to see how the policy-makers in Europe are going to reach out to these people, go and visit them in their home, see what their experiences are like and how they live.”

We call upon the European Union to require the Member States to present an evaluation of the impact of their economic policies (budget and structural reforms) on growth, employment and poverty. We also call upon the European Union to do the same thing for the decisions taken at the European level.

We call upon the European Union and the Member States to ensure that training programmes for EU officials and professionals responsible for implementing policies include knowledge building about poverty and the conditions in which impoverished families and individuals have to live. Training programmes should be designed to develop the skill required to work in partnership with People living in poverty and social exclusion.

We call upon the European Union to ensure that when it finances actions and projects it includes the people who are affected by them in the consideration of the funding allocation criteria. This will make it possible to focus the money on addressing fundamental issues whilst avoiding unnecessary waste.

“It is our firm hope that, within the European Parliament, members of all parties will be able to continue to invest their efforts with great determination, since poverty is far from being a marginal issue. Indeed, it is a crucial issue for Europe: there cannot be a Europe based on democracy, peace and human rights whilst poverty and misery continue to exist within its borders. The world is currently seeking new sustainable development goals for the post 2015 period and needs a Europe which is committed to forgetting no one. This project is underpinned by the commitment and responsibility of each and every member of society.”*

Isabelle Perrin, Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World.

* The proposals set out in this document are also based on other work carried out at previous sessions of the European Fourth World People’s University, as well as work undertaken to evaluate the Millennium Development Goals and the common commitments of ATD Fourth World.

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PROPOSALS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND TO MEMBER STATES

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