



CONFERENCE OF INGOs  
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

## International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

On 17 October 2014 in Turin<sup>1</sup>

### Context

The Council of Europe has organised in Turin, on 17 and 18 October 2014, a High Level Conference on the European Social Charter. The focus was on the evolution of European legal systems and the challenges States have to face for ensuring to all persons living on the European territory their access to all social and economic rights especially in the present times of crises and post-crisis.

The INGO Conference of the Council of Europe decided to join its efforts to this event by organizing, also in Turin, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty of 17 October 2014 and by sending to the High Level Conference a strong message written during this day together with people living in poverty.

### Reminder

The **Joint Declaration** of the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Conference of INGOs «Acting together to eradicate extreme poverty in Europe» signed on 17 October 2012 marks a firm commitment of the four pillars of the Council of Europe in the constant struggle against poverty.

### The three objectives of the international day on 17 October 2014 are about

- highlighting the progress made at grass root level for «repairing» the dignity of people living in poverty
- collecting testimonies on continuing violations of social human rights
- identifying the challenges governments and regional and local authorities have to face together with the civil society in order to advance a common goal: zero extreme poverty in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Turin is the city where the European Social Charter was opened to the signature of the Member States of the Council of Europe on 18th October 1961

**Programme**  
**Turin**  
**Palazzo Civico, Sala delle Colonne**  
**17 October 2014**

8h45 Welcome of participants

9h00 – 10h15 Opening and introductory contributions

**A word of welcome by Piero Fassino, Mayor of Turin or his representative**

**Jean-Marie Heydt**, President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe

**Salim Muslumov**, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

**Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni**, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

10h30 – 12h30 **4 workshops**

12h30 – 14h30 Lunch organised at the insertion cooperative Dynamo Coop of Turin

14h30 – 17h00 **Presentation of the results of the workshops and discussion**

Moderator: **Elisabeth Prieur**, ATD Fourth World

**Conclusions: Peter Verhaeghe**, Caritas Europa

17h00 -17h30 Ceremony to mark the 17h October, with reading of the text of the commemorative stone at the Trocadéro, Paris

*Working languages: English, French, Italian*

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## **Content of this report:**

1. Opening speeches
2. Summary of the discussions that took place in the 4 workshops
3. Short presentation of main projects described during the meeting
4. Testimonies of people living in poverty
5. Synthesis report and some crosscutting remarks
6. Message sent to the High Level Conference

80 persons representing NGOs from 11 countries<sup>2</sup> attended this meeting organised by the INGO Conference of the Council of Europe together with the Service of the European Social Charter and the Civil Society Division.

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## **Reminder Article 30 The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion**

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the Parties undertake:

A to take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance;

B to review these measures with a view to their adaptation if necessary

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<sup>2</sup> Albania, Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Romania, UK, Ukraine

## 1. Opening speeches

**Jean-Marie HEYDT**, President of the Conference of INGOs

Mr. Minister, representative of the President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,  
Madam Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe,  
Madam Elide Tirsi, First Deputy Mayor representing Mr. Fassini, Mayor of Turin  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I must first apologize for François Vandamme, Representative of Belgium to the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and the European Code of Social Security who can't be with us this morning.

I would also like to thank especially the Minister and the Deputy Secretary General for taking on their today particularly busy time to be with us this morning. There are many other meetings today with the High Level Conference and this gives even more importance to their presence here among us.

It is quite usual to say that I am «happy» or feel «honored» to be with you this morning... and it's clear that I have these feelings, but what I would like to say here is how happy I am that YOU are here, that my friends and colleagues of the Conference of INGOs at the Council of Europe have achieved what still was a challenge some months ago. It's a large group of people who made this meeting to happen within the Group «Extreme poverty»; I will just say my thanks to AIC, Caritas, FIAPA, ESAN, ATD Fourth World and, please, forgive me if I forgot some organisations. I express my very special thanks to the Italian organisations who were the local actors of the organisation of this day.

Since 2011 we achieve to give strength to the symbolic date of 17<sup>th</sup> October, so that it's not just "one international day ....among others" quickly forgotten the following day, but it's making that the meaning given to this day becomes the force that pushes our action during the whole year.

I want to remind that in 2012 the Conference of INGOs was carrying a joint Declaration with the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, a common commitment to take into account all those who are victims of oblivion, poverty and misery and to make sure that the policies of the Council of Europe are progressing in this sense.

This year, we want to use our weight as civil society, for making our contribution heard at the High Level Conference of the Council of Europe on the European Social Charter, which is held here in Turin this afternoon and tomorrow.

Better than anyone else you are aware that we have at our disposal a great international legal framework, a high-quality tool. Several articles of the European Social Charter, including Article 30, provide tools for fighting against poverty. And our States, which were

at the origin of this Charter, always show their will to combat poverty, but they encounter difficulties when it comes to the full implementation of this article. So it is up to us, as actors involved in the NGOs and up to people who lived or are living in poverty to give content to this Charter, and particularly to Article 30, to give “a shape” to the text thus contributing to the creation of a precise jurisprudence.

The proposed workshops will allow for having an exchange on the basis of examples and experiments going beyond nice sentences and good talk. We know that poverty is not just the lack of material means but that it also generates social consequences and therefore human consequence. We know perfectly how to repair a broken leg, but the plaster used to repair the skeleton is of no use for restoring human dignity. It is by inventing effective means for promoting participation in civic life and dignity for the most vulnerable persons that we will open new ways towards resilience. I want to use that word in this context too.

We can only achieve this with the light and help of people who, themselves, have found the strength and confidence to take their lives in their hands and who are now supporting other excluded persons.

Overcoming administrative barriers, misunderstandings, prejudices, and ensuring the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion as provided for in Article 30, will become a reality if we are able to suggest to the States the best ways for reaching this goal.

I feel sure that the conclusions of your exchanges will give me the honor to bring, in your name, a good result of your work to the High Level Conference

I thank you for your attention.

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**Salim MUSLUMOV**, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of Azerbaijan, on behalf of the Azerbaijani Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This event is an occasion for us- governments, parliamentarians, local and regional authorities and NGOs – to come together to confirm our commitment to the eradication of poverty in Europe.

Unfortunately, poverty is not diminishing in Europe. On the contrary, over the last few years, we have seen an increase in poverty across our member States. The economic and financial crisis, and the resulting austerity measures, have seriously affected, and continue to affect, the social welfare of our societies.

All countries are facing massive challenges. Unemployment, poverty and social exclusion are on the rise. The situation of those who are already in a dangerous situation – such as refugees, internally displaced people, migrants, ethnic minorities, the Roma or other vulnerable groups of persons – has often deteriorated. Others, not traditionally found in a dangerous situation, are now living near or on the poverty line. With public funds under pressure, persons with disabilities, children, mono-parental families or the elderly are, in particular, at a higher risk of falling into poverty. There has been a clear increase of children affected by extreme poverty across Europe. The situation is dire and any further worsening must be halted.

For the Committee of Ministers, the protection and promotion of social rights is a crucial element in addressing social issues, including with regard to combating poverty and social exclusion. The work of the Council of Europe is largely based on the implementation of the revised European Social Charter and the Protocol providing for a System of Collective Complaints as well as the European Code of Social Security and its Protocol. These legal instruments are important tools to identify and remedy shortcomings regarding the protection of social rights in member States. The Committee of Ministers regularly invites those member States that have not yet done so to consider ratifying them.

As you are aware, this afternoon a High Level Conference on the European Social Charter will begin. Discussions will focus on the Charter and its application throughout Europe in a period of crisis and in the crisis exit phase. It will look at austerity measures in times of economic hardship, their impact on social rights and the Charter's contribution to overcoming the crisis, having regard also to the synergies between the law of the European Union and the provisions of the Charter. The conclusions of this Conference should give concrete food for thought for the future action of the Organisation in the social field.

It is most appropriate therefore that your seminar here today will focus on the evolution of European legal systems and the challenges facing States in order to guarantee the economic and social rights of all people living in Europe. I am sure your meeting will bring a valid contribution to the debate. For there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Different member States, different stakeholders, all have a role to play. Each must explore the different avenues open to them in following the common objective of lessening poverty.

Your discussion will undoubtedly focus on Article 30 of the European Social Charter which provides for the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion. This is an important article. It confirms the approach of member States that living in a situation of poverty and social exclusion violates the dignity of human beings. It is also the first binding human rights provision for the protection against poverty and exclusion.

Article 30 requires the adoption of a «comprehensive and coordinated approach» which explicitly aims at combating poverty and social exclusion. This implies taking measures, in adequate quantity and quality, in particular as regards employment, housing, education and social and medical assistance.

Before concluding, I would just like to pay tribute to all those people and organisations, and in particular the NGOs present here today, who, on a daily basis, strive to improve the social conditions of people in their respective countries. In promoting social rights, supporting the more vulnerable in our societies, through addressing topics such as food security and the fight against wastage – your activities are a highly valuable asset to democratic societies.

On behalf of the Azerbaijani Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, I wish you a successful event. Your discussions are important ones. I am sure they will be useful to all those present here in Turin this week. I thank you for your attention.

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**Gabriella BATTAINI**, Deputy Secretary General

Good morning everybody. Thank you very much for your kind introduction, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, dear Minister, for being with us at the opening of what I would like to define as “the real beginning” of the social summit that is going to take place in Torino and congratulations indeed to the group - the “group poverty” which you mentioned Mr. Chairman who was working and preparing the event today. I would also like very much to welcome the initiative of the Conference of the INGOs to mark the international day dedicated to the eradication of poverty by having this event here in Torino and not in Strasburg or somewhere else, but to be here with us, in order to make sure that you give a voice to the social summit—a strong voice I hope- tomorrow with the text that you will bring to the meeting at the concluding session, the voice of the civil society. It’s a very important dimension of the whole set of activities that we are going to run during this whole week.

I also welcome very much the fact that in the title of the conference that you have organised you indicated that you want to focus your discussion on Article 30 of the revised European Social Charter which indeed states that, and I quote: “Everyone has the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion.”, As certainly you know better than I do, this Article 30 was introduced in the European Social Charter in 1996 and it was the first time that a clear identification of poverty per se was made in the Charter. Since we are here together it’s important to remember who pushed for that Article to be introduced. Was it a government? I am afraid not. Was it a Parliamentarian, or the Parliamentary Assembly? I am afraid not. Indeed this Article is there since 1996 because a number of INGOs around ATD Fourth World took a very strong lead in the debate and made it so that today we have this Article in the revised European Social Charter. So, if we are here today with such an important article, it is because of the work you did and that your predecessors in the Conference of INGOs succeeded to do. I put emphasis of course on Article 30 but let’s not forget that there is also Article 31 – the right to housing - which is

very much connected to Article 30. So, personally I've always liked to see them both together.

I really would like to refer to what our Minister said a few minutes ago. Let's be clear, Article 30, as other articles of the Charter, is not an article creating an obligation of results. It creates an obligation of means to be invested, as you described so clearly, with a view to create the process that can lead to the eradication of poverty. So this is why we need to be involved constantly on a regular basis, in order to make sure that this process takes place properly. I was inspired by your statement and I wanted to make this comment.

Notwithstanding the fact that we have had these articles in the revised European Social Charter now for two decades, we still have to come together today in order to repeat that poverty must end. But poverty hasn't ended at all and as we enter the 7<sup>th</sup> year of the economic crisis, it is even getting worse. Some austerity measures had a negative impact on the living conditions of millions of people and those who are poor are indeed becoming poorer. So it is clear that we must end this situation. Something has to be done. The Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe wrote in a comment that you might have seen: "governments and money lenders should start considering social and economic rights not as a luxury but as an internal part of the economic recovery plans of our countries". Growing evidence suggests indeed that economic development is more sustainable and societies, as you said, are more resilient when social rights are protected. Many economists now, even from the World Bank and the FMI, are saying so and this could be the starting point, I believe, for the considerations and debates of today.

Mr. Chairman, you referred to the joint Declaration that the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Conference of INGO's signed and by which they took to work together to eradicate poverty. So there was a clear mobilisation by the four main instances of the Organisation to work together. On top of that, a year ago, in Strasburg, we heard testimonies from those living in poverty and listened to them and to what they were suggesting in order to get out of this situation. So now, I would say, let us transform all the words and good examples that we heard into action. This year again, you will hear about new experiences or experiments in order to get out of poverty. And I am sure that this will enrich all the knowledge that you have gained from a very practical work, down to the earth level, in order to face poverty. I think that this is an important dimension of your work, I understand that you are going to separate in workshops, precisely with the purpose of becoming very concrete and to the point.

Now, as far as the Council of Europe in a global sense is concerned, it is clear that we really mean it when we say that we'd like to eradicate poverty. And, as you know, our work is carried out through a number of treaties. In particular some of the articles of the European Convention on Human Rights are very important, obviously the European Social Charter too, but also I refer to the European Code of Social Security that, I don't know why, is very often forgotten in the debates, and yet it is the backbone of the social system in a given country. So, I wanted to use the opportunity to re-inject attention on the European Code of Social Security.



And in addition to that, you also have a new intergovernmental committee at the Council of Europe which is responsible for continuing thinking about issues of social cohesion.

Coming back to the European Social Charter, Article 30 of the revised Social Charter can indeed, let's say, hold governments accountable. The problem is that so far only 17 countries have ratified that article and not the 47 member States of the Council of Europe. So we are still at the beginning of a process, as you can see, it's already a good number – 17 – but it's not yet the 47.

Now, your Conference which is here with a number of people, I do believe that you can continue to play a very important role and I would like to mention three things that NGOs can really do.

The first one is of course the fact that you can raise awareness about this important Article 30 and lobby member States to accept it. We have to go together in this fight so that we progress from 17 to 47. That is the first concrete thing that I would like you to consider.

The second point which I think is very important as well is that you can - you are authorized to- make comments on the national reports that come from the member States in relation to Article 30 for the 17 countries which have the obligation to write a report because they ratified this article. You, as NGOs, can make comments and shed, share, a new light on the reports of the governments, the 17 governments, if you have alternative or different viewpoints. You have the right. Use this right of comments.

And the third point is the one of the procedure of Collective Complaints. You know very well that international NGOs can seize the European Committee of Social Rights in case of alleged violations of the Charter. So you can play a role, the same as trade unions can play or employers' associations; the civil society can bring a case to the European Committee of Social Rights. I think it's a possibility which has already been used but continue, continue to use it and put the necessary, adequate pressure on the member States.

These were my three concrete proposals. I hope that they will somehow be useful in the way which you will now be discussing in your workshops about the fight against poverty. I wish you a very fruitful discussion and I am really looking forward to what you, Mr. Chairman, will come and tell us tomorrow in the other building which is only a few minutes away from here and where we will have the conclusions. I will be present and speak at the concluding session tomorrow. I really very much like you to come forward with some good and strong proposals. Thank you very much for your attention.

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**Elide TIRSI**, first member of the City Council, responsible for housing, migrants and social affairs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly happy to welcome you here in Turin. We are, all of us, bearing in our heart the same concern about poverty. I am happy also that you have decided to consider in depth the important issue of poverty in these days where there is in Turin a meeting of Ministers coming from all European States.

It's my belief that poverty, social justice and equity should be the central issue in Europe in these times where very many States have to cope with an economic and social crisis. If we really want to go on struggling for social cohesion we have to focus on good collaboration between political institutions and the world of non-for-profit organisations. This should be even stronger than what it has been till now.

The Italian Constitution contains the principle of subsidiarity. It means that the State has to take into consideration what people can do, when they are grouped in civil society organisations, for solving the problems that arise in their area, in their community. For me, this principle is very important because it implies that political bodies and institutions are working on an equal footing together with the civil society organisations which, with the actions they have chosen to carry out are able to solve the problems at grass root level.

Today, the work achieved by NGOs is paramount not only because of the value of their daily actions, but also because they are networking , which is the best way for raising awareness on the problems that are to be solved, and especially the problem of poverty. It is very important to strengthen a culture that pays attention to the danger of marginalization and poverty because it is the only way for maintaining the degree of civilization of a country, and also because it will create a real social cohesion without inner tensions and allowing for the European States to take, or to take again, the opportunities for developing a growth that will not only be an economic growth, but also a social growth.

This is why I am really welcoming you and I would like to say my special thanks to those who have got the idea to organise this day in Turin.

Turin has since many years a history of working together with the actors of the third sector, with all the organisations of volunteers that are, for our action, a very precious, essential and strong network.

I wish you a very good day.

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## **2. Report of the discussions that have taken place in the four workshops**

General thematic of the workshops: **Acting together against poverty**

Presentation and topics:

Workshop 1      **The situation of the elderly and families living in poverty**

led by the International Organisation IAC<sup>3</sup> and the International Federation of Associations of Elderly People (FIAPA<sup>4</sup>)

Workshop 2      **Access to rights and the role of NGOs**

led by the European Social Action Network (ESAN)<sup>5</sup>

Workshop 3      **Food security and the fight against waste**

led by Caritas Europa

Workshop 4      **Think, decide and act together against poverty**

led by the International Movement ATD Fourth World

Four questions had been proposed for guiding the discussion in all four workshops

- a) How to promote participation to the life of the community and dignity for the most vulnerable persons?
- b) How do NGOs, together with people living in poverty “invent ways to restore people’s dignity “ (self-help groups, access to an address, social shops .....) Where and how did these persons find the necessary force and confidence for taking their lives in their hands and supporting others?
- c) How would it be possible to improve achievements despite bureaucratic barriers, misunderstandings and prejudice?
- d) How and by which means is it possible to ensure the right to protection against poverty and social exclusions (article 30)?

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<sup>3</sup> IAC International Association of Charities

<sup>4</sup> FIAPA Fédération Internationale des Associations de Personnes Agées

<sup>5</sup> ESAN European Social Associations Network

## **Workshop 1: The situation of the elderly and families living in poverty**

Coordinator: Maritchu Rall, IAC

Report by Giovanna Vergnano IAC

The two projects presented this morning by IAC Turin have given a short but very enlightening overview of the voluntary work achieved by our organisation in times where public authorities can no more make sure that all citizens will have access to the Rights they are entitled to by the Constitution of Italy nor to provide the means for combating poverty as written in the article 30 of the European Social Charter.

The group NES<sup>6</sup> has explained how they help vulnerable families that are the more often wounded by life, women left alone with their children and who need material and psychological support so as to recover their autonomy and be included in the society.

The group «NEW DAWN” is working with foreign minors having no family and for whom, according to the New York Convention on the rights of minors, the municipality must provide assistance. In 1998 the city of Turin had appealed to associations to jointly manage a project for providing these youngsters with a home. The IAC responded by welcoming young people in a building made available for this purpose. The first young migrants were coming from Albania and others came from many different States.

Although these two projects are focused on different groups of persons, the goal was and remains the same: to give hope to people burdened by negative experiences like so many women in the NES project or foreign minors who arrived with traces of violence on their bodies and souls.

**The way to restore people’s dignity is to show them attention, understanding and confidence in their ability of revival.** It is crucial for people who first of all suffer from loneliness to know that there is someone who thinks about them. It’s this proximity that characterises our support.

**But it’s very difficult to have a feeling of dignity when one has no home, no job and no money to send children to school or to buy medicine.** The reductions in public spending penalized primarily the weakest parts of the population.

Both groups have made every effort for finding flats for these persons, but it has become more and more difficult. Families that are followed by the NES project are living in social housings found thanks to an agreement with the Territorial Agency for Housing and a foundation. It is currently very difficult to get a social housing that is mostly allocated after a very long waiting time despite the fact that we can see that countless social housings remain unoccupied for years in Italy.

Once minor youth have reached the age of 18 they need help for finding a flat and this is only possible if they first have found a job, as this young said in his testimony<sup>7</sup>.

Finding a job becomes more and more difficult because the crisis has severely diminished non specialised work which is the only one that people with no professional skills can do. Some women may find a job; they do cleaning or help elderly people. According to available resources it may be possible to get a grant for work, but it does not happen frequently now. In former times these grants, allocated for a work placement, generally

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<sup>6</sup> See below «remarkable achievements»

<sup>7</sup> See below in «testimonies»

ended in a real employment but now it is merely a job for some months in a foundation or a municipality.

The two groups are also concerned with education; but compulsory school is not really for free and it is necessary to organise free distributions of textbooks and school supplies and to support students in their homework.

Both groups have underlined the fact that we must go beyond mere assistance and find for each person a path which gradually leads to independence. For example, by asking a young foreigner to participate in cooking and cleaning of the house where he lives. Women who are supported by NES undertake in writing to pay back the sums lent to them as soon as they will have the opportunity to do so.

Networking with public entities, foundations and all kinds of organisations is a great help for facing the more and more complex problems linked to vulnerable people's inclusion.

### **Contribution of the representatives of FIAPA**

*Luciano Peirone, Università 'G.d'Annunzio' di Chieti-Pescara, SIPI (Società Italiana de Psicologia dell'Invecchiamento) e AIP (Associazione Italiana di Psicologia)*

*Fabio Menicacci, FIAPA Segretario Nazionale ANAP*

*Enrico Parpaglione, Ordine degli Psicologi, Consiglio Regionale del Piemonte. Torino*

In order to complete the report of this workshop we will quote some economic data, make short sociological remarks and finally give a few methodological indications as to the support of aging people living in poverty.

In a nutshell, some data on the poverty rate of elderly people in Italy: 44% of retired people live in conditions of half-poverty with a pension lower than 1000 € a month. This is an alarming data but what is more is that, according to the National Institute of Statistics, the number of elderly people experiencing absolute poverty has risen by 22% last year. This means that up to 888.000 retired people who are over 65 have no more the necessary financial resources for accessing to goods and services that are necessary for living. On the basis of these data we can say that more and more elderly people experience a social disease.

From a sociological point of view we have to underline that it is important to develop horizontal networking for combating poverty and, for so doing, to involve an important number of volunteers. **We would like to insist as well on the necessary training of these volunteers who are supporting persons who are not only suffering a material poverty that may be expressed in figures, but also a great immaterial poverty resulting from negative feelings, prejudice, stereotypes and also sometimes from loneliness. This needs a knowhow in listening to them, identifying their needs and in finding together adapted answers.**

What are the risks to which vulnerable people are the most exposed? Financial risks, of course, linked to their low purchasing power for answering their daily needs. But there are also risks of psycho-pathological effects that we have to prevent or to cure, as for instance the feeling of being abandoned or useless.

The Society of Psychologists, represented here by its Regional Order, can do a lot by making available to associations its internal skills and relational capacities with institutional partners. Our interventions on poverty of families and older people can be as diverse as:

- facilitating access to care and support through better collaboration between public and private sector;
- promoting social cohesion and the role of associations in particular for the protection of the elderly;
- organising the Microcredit; psychologists can, with their skills, provide support for the use and management of this instrument for families in need.

These actions aim to create a virtuous circle between citizens, public institutions and professionals for supporting the poorest groups in society.

We can, in this context, come up with some methodological considerations that are based on the WHO<sup>8</sup> guidelines. They are about a participatory approach in the organisation of support. Involvement of the persons in every project concerning them is a key principle of social psychology and associations. Research and experience do indeed teach us that only a project developed jointly with the person will be really effective. WHO uses for this a keyword that is dear to us, «empowerment», a concept that goes beyond participation in project development; it's actually taking true ownership of the project and this involves taking responsibility.

It is really about «making human beings growing» according to the techniques of health psychology. This would require:

- helping everyone to develop coping strategies in relation to their particular situation;
- creating and implementing best practice in the health and social sector, but also in the cultural sector;
- referring to Article 30 of the European Social Charter.

Basically, it's about giving meaning and life to our very sick society so that it will again become a true “community” based on the sense of belonging of each one, on solidarity with all and on cohesion in diversity as well as cohesion between generations.

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## **Workshop 2: Access to rights and role of NGOs**

Coordinator: Léon Dujardin, ESAN

This report has been made with a number of quotations taken in the contributions of the participants whose name is not always indicated.

“The real life conditions of a great number of persons must call us to improve the **rights and duties** of people so as to achieve **justice for all**. For facing this challenge it is necessary to bring together in a common work: public policy officers, actors in the social

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<sup>8</sup> WHO World Health Organisation

field, organisations, citizens, families and individuals themselves with a real sense of joint responsibility”.

Some organisations indicated that their specific purpose was to improve the access to rights for people who are living in difficult conditions by providing them with the legal advices they need in their different steps for finding a home or a job. We have heard the example of a service for advice and mediation that functions in a district of social housings in Dublin with volunteers who are specialised in law. The representatives of this organisation regretted that Ireland did not yet ratify the Article 31 of the European Social Charter but they are nevertheless preparing a collective complaint to be sent to the Committee of Social Rights. This complaint will be built on other articles of the Charter.

The representative of the regional organisation of people with visual impairments in Piemonte has also reported on their work for the defence of people’s rights and has mentioned that in Italy, because of the crisis, the law on compulsory employment quotas for people with disabilities is no more respected. One does also fear that the future law on organisations that is currently in its drafting process could end in cuts in the financial support allocated to organisations and this would hamper their capacity of action in defence of people’s rights.

Other NGOs are working directly with people living in poor districts and so does, for example, the association UTOPIA, grouping women in a remote suburb of Rome. These social housings are very far away from places of social life so that meetings have slowly been organised on the spot for fighting against violence and trying to make that people know each other and speak together. The organisation is now grouping 38 families and their aim is above all to make that children are not discriminated against at school on grounds of their origin or because of the place where they live. Home work support is organised for helping them.

Children are also the main focus of an NGO in Portugal, in a poor district of Lisbon. This organisation acts in addition as “a forum for debates” in the society and raises awareness on efficient positions as to problems of children and youth.

Participants underlined how difficult it is to support persons who live in poverty for having access to their rights. The “guiding principles” adopted by the United Nations are of course an efficient help but they are not binding. It is therefore up to the NGOs to promote them and the new UN handbook will be very useful for so doing.

Eradicating poverty is not utopia; it’s a very precise aim that could be formulated as follows: **zero poverty**. It’s possible to reach this aim because it will change our vision of difficulties. Participants were reminded that, years ago, in the fight against work accidents, in those times considered as being part of the “risk of the job”, the aim was fixed at “zero accidents”. This produced a shock and a change in peoples’ minds; the aim was not to have “the smallest possible number of accidents”, but zero, zero accidents. Starting from this moment things were considered in a different way. It should be the same for the eradication of poverty.

“We are here speaking about eradication of poverty, - somebody said- but poverty is currently increasing in Europe because of the crisis which means that more and more people are losing their rights, because there is a level of poverty where one has no way left for joining the society”.

“And me, this causes me to react, because it is true that my parents were poor and that me too, I experienced poverty, I went downwards, I just sank into oblivion. Thanks to the movement ATD Fourth World I could surface again. And presently, **we who are coming**

**from poverty, we have the duty to keep next to those who are the more vulnerable, the more excluded ones; because, if we don't do so they will sink into general oblivion."**

Of course, poverty increase may be linked with the present economic crisis and we all know that this crisis can last a long time. "However, we have to place poverty in a much broader perspective, a more societal one", - a participant said-; "it's an issue related to how we are living together in a country and if we really want things to improve for everyone. For a long time it was usual to think that progress will automatically reach everyone, but we see that it's no more the case so that we have to find other ways than conventional economic power for reaching poverty eradication; it could be social economy and other inventions ... **And if I have to express a belief here it's that all this necessary creativity of NGOs can only be extended, enlarged, by public policies being developed at one time or another, if we want that rights are for all and for each one."** For all" is a matter of statistics. "For each one", means really for each person, and then we have to go for the poorest of the poor, there where we are."

In this regard Jean-Bernard Marie, representative of the Conference of INGOs at the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) of the Council of Europe, has highlighted the difficulties faced in advancing public policies. "Member States of the Council of Europe are perhaps not convinced that economic, social and cultural rights are really true rights; rather, they see them as social goals; - if we can, we do, for generosity-. But Article 30 is more than a goal, it is a right, a right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, and a right is something that means that there is an obligation imposed to a debtor and that each person is a subject of that right ... There is still a lot of work to be done to convince government experts that this Charter is a real treaty. This is not to discourage us, but we must be aware of the distance existing between us who are used to work with people living in poverty, and State Governments that are not involved at the same level, and our role as NGOs is to work on changing attitudes. We have to be aware of that distance and take steps and develop methods for recalling these rights ...

We should remember also that we can rely on other documents. Indeed, many States have ratified the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, or texts of the International Labour Organisation. We have instruments that can be used to support a rights approach because answering needs – which is certainly very important for people who are living in poverty - does however not give them their dignity as rights holders back."

**"We have heard testimonies that are a strong message. Hearing is one thing, not to forget is another thing and drawing the consequences in practice is a real experience, at least it's one for NGOs. "**

During the discussions it became clear that NGOs have a dual role of being both rights defenders and supporting people in their personal development so that after a long journey, they take themselves the defence of their own rights and of those of others.

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### **Workshop 3: Food security and the fight against waste**

Coordinator: Pierluigi Dosis, Caritas Turin

Rapporteur: Elisabeth Marie, Caritas Europe

The topic had been chosen in reference to the global campaign against hunger of Caritas:

“One human family, food for all.”

In all European countries, more people are getting poorer with an increase in food demand but also in help for housing and health care. Just two examples: at the Food Bank of Piemonte food demand has increased by 35%. In France, 3.5 million people have no food security and have to rely on food support.

The causes are multiple and the challenge for humanity is becoming always harder because the modern world under construction is built with mega cities where people have no alternative to buying in stores for getting food and have lost the opportunity to cultivate a piece of land.

**Whereas in European countries food insecurity does increase for an ever growing number of persons, we see paradoxically that waste does exist in our context of “excess” where considerable amounts of food are thrown away in supermarkets, canteens, hospitals etc. (one third of our food is lost or wasted).**

We looked at the whole planet and mentioned this well-known food sovereignty in southern countries, where there is an urgent need to promote family farming; it was observed that there is also waste in these countries but it happens for other reasons, particularly a lack of effective storage areas and a lack of organised transport from one region with good production to another region that lacks food resources, and this within the same country.

We also heard Hedi Condroyer, a student at the Faculty of Administration and International Exchanges of Paris-Est Creteil University who recalled the definition of food security adopted by the FAO<sup>9</sup>: **“Food security exists when all people, at any time, have economic, social and physical access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences to enable them to lead healthy, active lives.”**

Two emblematic examples in Italy have been described:

- The video of the anti-crisis project *Fa bene*, shows the experience made in Turin on 6 markets. Markets are a very lively place in Italy; green grocers selling there are very committed to this project. It's easy: if you buy 1 kilo fruit or vegetables, half of it is given to families who need food. Those who receive this fresh food must commit themselves to “give something in return” such as providing a service. In the video, we see a person who distributes empty boxes to the sellers and, at the end of the market, carries with a tricycle the filled boxes to the families.

- Another example, also in the region of Piemonte: starting from a cooperative of farmers, the bishopric had been contacted and provided land for an agricultural project so that after

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<sup>9</sup> FAO Food and Agriculture Organisation

so many years of assistance, land became again a place of education. An association has been created for the management of this project; people are making a 12 months training so as to learn agricultural work, and after this period of time they are employed. Part of the harvest is given to the families, another part is sold.

These two examples are a lesson for us and give good advice for creating a **more holistic development scheme**:

- we are at the 3rd generation of assisted person: it's absolutely necessary that children don't follow the model of survival through assistance. Rather than just providing food we should help families to **make plans for their future** (which seems to be dark for the time being) to **develop their talents** (every person has something to say, something to share); **these are the goals that we could reach starting from food need used as a gateway for initiating a development process**;
- The example emphasize the importance of the local territory (market or land)
- both examples are a trial to **restore people's dignity**: buying food at a low price in social shops or producing one's food provides more dignity than receiving a food parcel. An **alliance** between the various levels of responsibility (families, associations, sponsorship, public authorities) allows to reintroduce people as participating subjects in the process.

Investment is not only a financial mechanism producing return; it is also a *social mechanism* that produces "profit" for the country. In the present context of crisis and austerity measures, a movement is emerging that tries **to look at the fight against poverty from a new perspective**.

*Responding together*: this project has been developed between the years 2010 and 2013; it was co-financed by the Council of Europe and the EU Commission. It was an effort to value and group several innovating actions in a network based on sharing ideas, exchanging resources and creating new social links. A big meeting took place In November 2013 at the end of the project *Responding together*. This was an opportunity to know and share a number of experiences made all over Europe in different areas suggesting ways of transformation ahead of the usual institutional process.

We must at a time have a holistic vision and build on small local experiences; we have to share them, to make them known so as to multiply them in the vast network of our NGOs and to involve whenever possible our local authorities and our States.

May this 17 October 2014 help us forward **the movement that changes policies and our societies**.

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#### **Workshop 4: Think, decide and act together against poverty.**

Coordinator: Jean Tonglet, ATD Fourth World Rapporteur: Annick Dendonker, ATD Fourth World

The general topic of the workshop was: how to act for the implementation of the article 30; how to make it becoming reality in our daily practice.

The discussion is starting on the basis of a current situation where people's dignity and rights are wronged. It's about a group of Roma people living in a suburb of Rome in what is called a «grouping centre» organised in a former factory in an industrial district. Two persons described their situation:

“We arrived in this relocation centre for a temporary housing after having passed 9 years in a camp, next to the ring road in Rome. (We are not people of the Travelers community). We were transferred to this centre, in principle just for 3 months, the time necessary for making some remediation to asbestos problems in the camp. In fact it is now 9 months that we are here. We are in a space without windows where the lights are on all day long. It's an old industrial shed. We have an area of 3.5 x 4 m per family. We are about 35 families, 300 people in all.”

“The camp where we lived before was a small camp for Roma people organised by the municipality, integrated enough, connected by transportation, and receiving the help of associations. This camp has been sequestered and all the sudden we found ourselves beyond the beltway without means of communication, with schools at 15 km, a true place of relegation.

Each family has one or two «rooms», we don't have the right to cook. Prepared meals are brought by the municipality, once daily in the evening. After 11 pm, the centre is closed, and the one who is not back in time has to spend the night outside. 22 supervisors control the operation of this place.”

The representative of the association reports that there is no school near to the center. Before, in the previous camp, there was a good relationship with the school, and a small bus for transportation.

What are the consequences of this situation for these families?

- Health consequences: a social centre is organized on the spot, but there is no medical centre. In the camp where they were before, they could go with their children twice a week to the pediatrician, outside of the camp.
- Consequences as to recognition of the dignity of the human person deprived of choice and unable to conceive a life project. **“You are not getting out of misery just because you have a roof and something to eat”.**

The association works with the persons who are living there looking together for practical solutions that would not necessarily be more expensive than what is done now but which would enable people to better manage their lives and their future.

**The cost issue was raised frequently during the exchange with examples from several countries. It was said that measures are not always appropriate and that it could be possible to do better for the same expense.**

One example is given on this issue; it's about a mother who has been accepted with her child in what is called in Italy a «residence» (A center for help to housing) where they occupy a room. They had been told that it was for 6 months. Now, it's already 16 years they stay there without having to pay for this little room. Presently the municipality wants to close this residence which is very expensive and proposes a rent help during 4 years. «But after these 4 years, what will I do? »asks this mother.

Often proposed measures are just «plasters», provisional solutions which eventually will last a long time, but they are not a route out of poverty. It is not enough to let people not starve to death and give them a roof. It's about building up a project with them so that they are becoming less dependent.

Article 30 specifies the right to effective access to work and training. Now, how can this happen for everyone, for the greatest number? The issue is above all how to overcome prejudices, especially regarding the Roma.

**What is missing is a real recognition of the human being. The person is seen as a problem, not as a person who wants to regain dignity. “Often we only tackle material problems, but when we recognize the person, then we see someone who is suffering, who has expectations and who has possibilities. What hurts people the most is to be nothing to anyone”** so somebody said.

Looking at the precise situation of these 30 Roma families it is clear that, despite the expenses incurred, it is the policies that failed, not the people.

Article 30 of the European Social Charter will be the basis of a collective complaint which is being prepared with the participation of the families themselves. For the top experts in the fight against poverty are those living in poverty. They are never consulted. Decisions on their future are made without them. «To think, decide and act together against poverty» is above all **WITH THEM**. This requires real changes.

These Roma families live exclusion among the excluded. They never have a right to rights. Camps are located outside of towns and villages, and families are always kept apart. Children do always play among themselves. Hardly do they give their address, that they are excluded from playing with others children.

About exclusion, several participants mention the issue of legal residence. In Turin, for example, those who live on an illegally occupied land are not recognised as residents. They do not experience only economic and social poverty; they are excluded from the society. How could they then consider themselves as subjects of rights?

**There is a danger for the society, a danger of growing rivalry among people living in poverty who are set against each other, homeless people, people from the Travelers community, and Roma people, all deprived of their dignity, all victims of prejudice.**

Indeed this is not only a problem of Roma people. Italian families are living in the same conditions in «residences» as that of Val Canuta. It's not possible to remain there after a given hour in the morning; associations can't enter the residence without having been authorized to do so by the municipality. When somebody wants to leave for more than 3 days, this person has to ask for an authorization 10 days in advance telling where he/she will go, for which job ...

NGOs also exchanged on some positive initiatives as access to housing so as to help people to live again in the society, access to water with no to cut off in case of non-payment, right to go to school with support for school books and transportation. The project for women to tell their story: “I tell you a story, it's my own story”.was mentioned.

It was also said that NGOs should seek to involve young people who want to help. They should be contacted through their usual media, twitter, facebook etc. If the work is not done it is also because there is no real awareness of what is happening. NGOS should communicate on the ongoing projects and ask for help.

Conclusion: NGOs must act as megaphones so as to promote transition of people from the margins to the center of society.

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### **3. Short presentation of main projects described during the meeting**

#### **Italy Nova Aurora «New Dawn» a residence for young migrants under 18**

Europe is experiencing a particular situation of poverty, that of the illegal presence on its territory of minors who are alone, with no family. This is particularly the case in Italy because of its geographical position on the Mediterranean coast. The phenomenon began in the late 90s with the arrival of a large number of young Albanians, followed by young Romanians, Moroccans, Egyptians, and a few years later young people fleeing situations of war as in Pakistan, Afghanistan or Central African countries; they are often seeking political asylum.

The Municipality of Turin, which according to the New York Convention on the rights of minors has a legal obligation to ensure basic social assistance to minors who are on its territory, launched a tender to all NGOs of volunteers for the implementation of an appropriate project. The St Vincent Team (IAC) responded by making time and skills of their volunteers available to the City Council. This is how we have created the «New Dawn» residence, a home for foreign minors in a building made available by the Salesian Fathers and in which, in sixteen years, have lived over 150 young people from various national groups and religions.

The Municipality of Turin leaves the minors with the Organisation and pays for each one a limited financial subsidy that covers part of their living expenses, housing and food as well as expenses for schooling, transport, medicines and recreation. Supervision is provided by volunteers for free except one educator who resides in that foster home.

**Volunteers provide a continuous presence (all day long and every night throughout the year)**, prepare meals, go with the youngsters to the administrations for making the necessary papers, encourage them to go to school regularly, make sure that they learn Italian, take care of their health, organise their free time and later on help them find work and housing.

The young migrants contribute to the life of the community by participating in turn in kitchen work, cleaning and for that they receive some little payment.

Once they graduated at the end of compulsory schooling they are oriented towards vocational training courses with internships or apprenticeships.

When they reach the age of 18, they still remain a few months in the home and then they leave if they have meanwhile found a job that allows them to rent a flat. In the situation of severe economic crisis that our city is currently experiencing it is becoming increasingly difficult to find work and earn one's living.

The volunteers aim at providing the young people who are under their responsibility with a positive experience, made of collaboration, respect of the rules of conviviality, commitment in studying and work, this altogether in a climate of friendship and welcome that is so necessary for these teenagers who, in many cases, experienced situations of

decline and violence. This is especially true for young people seeking political asylum because they carry with them, in their body and in their soul, signs of violence and struggle. For the volunteers it's a challenge that goes far beyond mere material help and calls on their relational skills and empathy.

In practice, the team of volunteers appoints for each youth one adult as a referent so as to create a special educational relationship between them, a relationship that may last even when the youth has left the home. It becomes a friendship that is lasting over years, with visits to the families in the country from where the youth were coming and with being present at their wedding day.

## **Italy NES Nessuno è straniero (Nobody is a stranger) welcoming foreign families**

The group of volunteers of this NES project was created to support families that are in difficult situations through activities aimed at including disadvantaged persons into the urban social fabric and at enhancing their capabilities. NES helps especially tenants of buildings owned by the Territorial Office of Housing. Some of the flats have been attributed to the Don Mario Operti Foundation that allocates them to needing families, many of which are single-parent families of foreign women with minor children. They need material and psychological support to achieve an independent and active life. They come mainly from Africa, Eastern Europe and Central America or South America.

**The premises of the NES project are located within the buildings where these families are living and, thanks to the daily presence of volunteers, our office has become a point of recourse not only for these women and their children but also for a large part of tenants of the group of buildings.**

Currently 18 volunteers and 13 employees are working there.

Because of the different levels of material, cultural, social and psychological difficulties of these families, NES strives to provide the necessary support through activities in various fields.

All activities have as main purpose to contribute to the inclusion of these families into the fabric of the urban society while seeking to avoid assisting them. For example, the financial support allocated to them is just a loan which they undertake in writing to pay back, even if it is only by very small amounts and when they can do so. In addition, many of the services tend to improve their ability to work and their socialisation as well as the education of their children.

**Often when arriving in this building, the only knowledge women are carrying with them is a series of sadly negative experiences that caused them to fall into poverty and thus in important psychological suffering.** This makes the volunteers' work particularly difficult and there are currently only few cases for which we can say that they have been completely solved. However some successes, even if still partial, encourage going on working in this direction.

So for example, a young Nigerian woman, sexually abused, after having courageously denounced those who exploited her, obtained a residence permit for herself and her two children; after having been in a shelter and a supportive home she came to live in one of the flats in this group of buildings. There she took some courses, passed her examination at the end of primary education and was able to start working; she received a "work grant"

which consists in a paid internship in private companies or associations where the employer is entrusted the task of the worker's training. In the case of this person her experience of internship was entirely consistent with the intentions of the legislator as it led to a permanent contract as a cook in a social cooperative that provides a canteen service.

A woman coming from Cameroon, a mother with three children, abandoned by her husband when she was pregnant of the third child, had been reported to the social services; they supported her not only financially but also by giving her a guardian, which was considered essential to help her building up the necessary emotional maturity so as to handle by herself her big family. Now she is able, in addition to her role as a mother, to take on a small work that she got from the organisation "me too, I am working"; this organisation supports women at risk of social exclusion and gives them part-time domestic work with elderly people having a low income and who don't really have a family network to rely on.

Finally, the return to the country of origin was organised for a Senegalese woman and her son, a young teenager. This mother, despite repeated trials of "work grant" was not able to find stable employment and her son, after having had challenging behaviours and bad company had already been arrested several times by the police and was threatened with criminal sanction. Because of this emergency situation it was agreed to consider with this woman her return to her home country. NES has used a project for support to return which provides economic assistance in addition to support for travel expenses. This enabled the purchase and shipment of devices for the small sewing business that the mother of this woman manages at Dakar. In so doing it was sought to provide this woman with a job that brings her an economic independence and therefore allows her to meet the commitment to pay back the amounts she had received during her stay with us. The project was also funded by the Operti foundation that granted a loan of honour. With the help of lawyers, also volunteers to IAC, who took over the legal aspect of the matter, the boy could leave Italy with his mother and presently both continue their rehabilitation path in the family and at work.

**In the current crisis, return to the country of origin may represent a new way of looking for a positive solution to the problems of migrants.** The Italian economy is deeply changed and foreign women, especially those who can do only unskilled work, are the most penalized; this low hope to solve the employment problem and in addition the urgent need to respond to serious family situations are such that it can be considered as a success to organise the return to the country of origin where, thanks to the experience and knowledge gained over the years passed in Italy, it is to be hoped that these women will develop themselves in the best possible way.

Finally, it should be noted that all these cases were helped by NES through collaboration with the Turin institutions dealing with migrants. Networking is indeed the only way to face the always complex and multiple problems that must be solved to support the inclusion of disadvantaged people in the social fabric.

### **France: The Notebooks «Tell for Acting» (ESAN)**

Hedi Condroyer, studying in France at the Faculty of Administration and international exchanges of Paris-Est Creteil University presents the French organisation called «Secours Populaire» (member of ESAN).

“This French organisation is based on partnership and solidarity: “Because everything that is human is also ours”, we help everyone without any discrimination and work in all fields of action: distribution of food and dresses as well as providing access to holidays, leisure, culture etc. We help each one according to his/her personality and life experience. The person who is pushing for the first time the door of the French Secours Populaire is performing a difficult path: it’s all, about coming and asking for what is absolutely needed, asking for help and asking this from people one doesn’t know. During individual interviews, we try and consider with them their future so as to bring the person back to having desires and hope. The French Secours Populaire answers emergency needs , mainly by providing food so as to loosen this grip of needs which constrains the individual to survive from day to day; this allows subsequently for a more holistic help, by listening and leading in the long term towards autonomy. **The most important seems to be the relationship of equality between the person seeking help and the one who is helping: it is the basis of creating *alliance*, instead of assistance.** With this concept of alliance, many people also want to be volunteers and organise solidarity.

I would like to give the example of precarious students who are more and more coming to our premises: 22,000 students a year who sometimes can no longer pay their rent, often don’t have health insurance, and are entitled to very small benefits if any. They are very eager to organise solidarity. And some have already been able to take care of the distribution of food parcels or to take children from poor neighborhoods for the first time on vacation, or to provide help for school work.

We have a special process which is called **«Tell for acting»!** Using small notebooks, we ask women and men who open the door of our association to write about their daily lives, their difficulties, about what causes their indignation or makes them happy but also about their vision of the society, of the world. We do not force them to write such and such things; it’s their cry, it’s their thoughts that they organise and deliver to us. Let me share with you just one example of these writings:

Djasem, 17, living in Marseille: “I want a job for making up for the living of my family, for having a better life. Life is a challenge. Each one has a task to achieve. I am angry when I get up in the morning and go looking for a job and don’t find one. The future, I would like it to be without sorrow, without begging, nor thieves, nor abuse, without addiction, illness, delinquency; with work for everyone so as to live normally. I want to help the homeless, the alcoholics and the small ones who stay in the streets in the evening”.

Sonia Serra in turn explains the role of these notebooks «Tell for acting». The Secours Populaire since 1989, collects written evidence so as to bring the voice of people in need at the highest political level, to promote actions of solidarity that are meeting people’s needs and wishes and to participate in the well-being of people by speaking or writing. **«Tell for acting»: a human venture that goes beyond solidarity based on doing together and causes us to achieve a real cultural work.** Indeed, at the Secours Populaire, in Marseille, the notebooks “tell for acting” have been a fabulous opportunity of expression and meetings. It was the starting point for a workshop dedicated to writing, a trans-formative action, bringing about autonomy and liberation through thinking and writing, **a co-development where understanding and surviving were part of the same.**

This way of thinking and my own experience led me to **solidarity work** and its application: with everyone, including people in difficulty; solidarity work is a set of coordinated human



activities to produce or contribute to produce what is useful and common to many people, so that everyone is responsible of everything and of all. Solidarity work produces goods, well-being and links. It saves **dignity**, while meeting essential needs: food, health care, learning, within self organised solidarities.

All such solidarity work doesn't go without difficulties, of course, because it goes against the stream of everyday life, of getting what we need by all means and the violence it causes; this work, because it's a real work, of course needs courage, but it simultaneously opens unsuspected possibilities, insofar that each human being is full of richness and hope. Isn't it what we are most needing right now?

With these notebooks "Tell for acting", cultural events is not geared towards an audience, they come from the place where people live; author, actor and citizen are joining in the same action **with the strong wish to hold on**.

Welcoming is essential, it must be constantly questioned as to its the capacity to capture the act of "telling" as well as the content of what is said; working together validates the strength of writing and the commitment to transform oneself, a steady *risorgimento*.

## **Italy «Fa bene» The market: a place of sociability and solidarity**

Pierluigi Dovis, Director of Caritas Turin

We had a serious problem with the European Union that changed its policy on food aid. In 2012 this represented a help of € 110 million for Italy and it was reduced to 30 million in 2014; the state added 3 million, but all in all it represents a decrease by almost 50%; in addition there is a change in the rules of use of this food aid, part of which must now be allocated to social inclusion actions of those in need. Very scarce means remain then for the actual food aid.

So we had to invent new forms of resources that would respect people's dignity. **This was the origin of the «Fa bene» project** which was set up not only to provide access to food but also to stimulate the economic development of the city by **involving greengrocers selling on the markets**. This happens in six market places in the city. **With this project some people with low income have also found a small job by taking part in the distribution of fruit and vegetables to the benefiting families**. We had hoped that one of these persons could come and speak about this job here, but this was not possible. However, he agreed to be filmed and journalists have made a report that has been shown on national channels in Italy.

The project is very simple: anyone who buys fresh products may, at the same time as the own personal purchase, buy vegetables or fruits that are put in baskets reserved for families in need of food. This basket is brought to these families at the end of the market by a carrier who will also get a basket or be given a small salary. Access to food and especially fresh quality products has become a problem in Turin. More than 2,000 pounds of vegetables and fruit are distributed in this way and thirty associations benefit from this system for the families they are caring for. This project is supported by the Municipality of Turin. We all know that poverty is not just a matter of lack of food and housing; it is also a problem of loneliness. Coming to the market for helping with the distribution of baskets is

then not only providing a small livelihood, but a means to fight against loneliness. This project has been taken over by the city of Milan and hopefully it will be replicated in other countries.

Let's underline a few important words:

- Networking: the local network on the spot. A right is alive only if it can rely on the local network that implements it.
- Giving Back: We asked people who receive food to participate in the distribution or by any other means of sharing in order to respect the right of these persons to be considered as capable and active subjects of citizenship.
- Recognising the signs of innovation that are present in our societies and ensuring their multiplication.
- Promoting work: with actions creating jobs that those concerned can keep on a long run.

**It has to be observed that many greengrocers are participating in this project which is also a support for the local economy.**

## **Ireland            A study on failure of housing policies**

An NGO working in a center for people in difficulty makes a sad statement. They notice that even when Ireland lived its «golden period», these people experienced the same conditions of poverty and exclusion as they do now. This raises the question of the persistence of poverty, even in periods of economic growth. Why does this happen? “To find an answer to this question we started with the very history of these people. We asked them to fill out questionnaires, very simple questionnaires, to make an inquiry. We asked the university to join us for a more scientific analysis. Then we organised a public meeting for explaining our findings. We had a confrontation with the Minister; we did not start from a rights approach denouncing that “such and such have no housing”, but we wondered why the state had failed to give a home to these people. We invited experts on human rights as a jury and journalists to try to understand this situation. We stressed that it is the role of governments to maintain a decent standard of living for all inhabitants of the country”.

## **Belgium How to avoid decisions on removal of children from their family.**

It is some years that a group of parents is working to ensure that, in situations of poverty, decisions on removal of children from their parents are not taken. They created a dialogue with the services of the Protection of Children and Youth. The work was resumed at the level of the Ministry. Parents and civil servants think together about how to best respect the child's interest. A working group has been set up dealing in particular with the records: «What do you write about us? We have no access to folders where you write about us», people were complaining. The goal is not to focus on material needs, even if they are desperate, but to try to give the person the opportunity to decide by him/herself so as not to impose a top-down decision.

## Italy

### A project of vocational training in agriculture

Like other NGOs, the IAC of the Region Piemonte is dealing with food security for persons living in poverty. Distributing food is one way for answering one of the most striking consequences of poverty but it doesn't solve the problem.

We are now already at the third generation of poverty which shows that our actions, the assistance that we have brought, have failed. Assistance brings about assisted people who are very vulnerable to changes in their situation. Of course, their first demand is for food. But we are aware that they also need education and that we have to promote vocational training opportunities.

**So we looked for available resources in our territory. Piemonte is the most important producer of rice in Europe. Could we try and make the earth becoming again a place for education? Could the earth help people to recover a sense of responsibility by achieving a task that produces a visible result?**

On this basis we decided to build up a project in agriculture and we contacted the bishop who, after a couple of weeks has found for us a land of 4 500 m<sup>2</sup>. This has given us the means not only to cultivate the land, but also to educate people and we decided that each person will have to make an apprenticeship of 12 months. But we could not manage this project just by ourselves. Networking with other local organisations was absolutely necessary; so we made contacts with an agricultural cooperative which took over all the administrative work, with the municipality and with the local health services for financial support. We have created an organisation for this partnership aimed at managing a small farm.

**For sure, it's not easy to join in a common work and the 3 first years were hard ones for our volunteers because we are accustomed to work in a different way as cooperatives, or as the municipality, but we had to cope with the daily reality and this helped us overcoming these differences.**

By the end of their training several persons could be employed with a long term labour contract.

The production is distributed half to the families living and working on the farm and half for the managing organisation so as to strengthen and widen the project.

**We have experienced how important it is to work at local level, with the network that is locally available and according to the local economic fabric.**

**We measured as well the importance of the principle of requiring for each gift something in return. It is the only way to bring back to these persons a small part of this dignity that they need to have for rebuilding themselves.**

## Portugal

### Encouragement to act

#### Isabel Porto

I am working at the Child Care Institute, a non-governmental institution that since 31 years promotes and defends the rights of children in Portugal. It is considered an institution of higher social interest and is characterized by being a forum of discussion / reflection with

active involvement in society, and raising awareness for an effective intervention on childhood and youth problems.

As guiding principles of our work I would like to emphasize integrity, respect, partnership and participation of people with whom we work.

Talking about children and young people is also talking about family, about society and about civil rights - fundamental rights that define us as a human civilisation.

Human rights should be guaranteed by birth. However, this is not the reality that we have, in Portugal, or in Europe or even in the World. Social policies should be consistent with human rights and their impacts, on the present and also on future generations, should be measured.

When we talk about poverty and social exclusion we talk about a clear violation of human rights, we talk about «political neglect», a crime against citizens, a crime against humanity.

**It is precisely, when a country is in crisis, and when there is a higher risk of poverty for the most vulnerable, that states should adopt exceptional measures to protect citizens and safeguard fundamental rights.**

**An intelligent society is the one that** contributes positively to preparing the evolution and the future of human civilization; it is the society that has people's welfare as a priority in its policies, and **knows that growth and economic development is only sustainable if it's compatible with human dignity.**

We also witness the low participation of citizens, not only in the promotion of their rights but also in reporting situations where these rights are clearly violated.

The defence of human rights is a daily construction of the future and, at a time when human rights are not guaranteed, we have to fight for them every day and for so doing the participation of the civil society is essential. The involvement of people in the decisions concerning their own life is crucial and promoting a greater civic participation of all citizens, should be a concern of everyone, politicians, NGOs and social workers.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Council of Europe for this meeting which is a clear expression of respect, protection and development of Human Rights and leave a message to all those who are present, using the words of Charles Chaplin:

“May your efforts challenge impossibilities and remember that great human achievements were conquered from what seemed impossible.”

## **Italy                      Acting becomes difficult... A legislation is expected**

Francesco Fratta

I am representing here the Italian federation of blind persons.

As it has been said this morning by the representative of the Municipality, we have in the Constitution of Italy a special mention of the principle of subsidiarity. We know very well this principle that we put in practice in our federation with actions shaped the nearest possible to people and aimed at promoting autonomy of young people, care for migrants, after-school support and access to work.

Now two things are necessary so that we can go on implementing this principle of subsidiarity; they are:

- **Financial support** for our organisations allowing for the fulfillment of their mission
- A precise and **clear legal framework** that would be developed together with the concerned persons. Indeed, it is important that the actions that are undertaken correspond to people's needs, especially for avoiding that they lose their job and are risking falling into poverty.

The first obligation of the State is its duty concerning its citizens to whom the State has to guarantee dignity, the necessary minimum for living and citizenship.

This does not mean making a whole series of declarations, no, it is about a duty, about laws and rules to be created, respected and monitored.

I want to stress it here: it is obvious that we are fully committed to implement the principle of subsidiarity. Within our federation we are making all efforts for struggling with people and avoiding that they fall into poverty. But for this to be successful we need both supports that I just mentioned, I mean financial support and a clear legal framework.

## **Ukraine            A new discovery of our national and personal dignity**

Anka Skorik

My name is Anka Skoryk. I represent the group IAC of my country. I come from Ukraine; to be precise from the city called Kharkiv (it is located in the Eastern part of Ukraine, close to the Russian border). Our organisation is active in the world since practically 400 years and in Ukraine only the last 20 years.

We have four groups: one in Eastern Ukraine – in my city Kharkiv, where live 1.5 million inhabitants. There are three groups in Western Ukraine, in small cities where the population is living a rather rural lifestyle. The forms of poverty in a big city are different from those in rural areas. There are different needs and requirements in these places and we try and answer differently to them. This year because of the very difficult political situation in Ukraine we have totally new challenges which are caused by the appearance of a new face of poverty and a new face of vulnerability. As all of you know, there is a conflict in the eastern part of our country. War always carries with itself poverty and lack of basic things, including lack of economic stability, unemployment, increasing prices, refugees and injured people.

In rural areas people in need are mainly the elderly, sick and lonely persons, with low pensions, who cannot take care of themselves because of sickness, and whose children are far abroad for earning their life (there is high unemployment at home). We visit them, prepare and carry hot meals for them, we help with some tasks in their houses or gardens, we organise the celebration of feasts, we gather them to socialize and prepare gifts for them.

In the villages there are also a high number of disabled people (people with a mental disability, deaf and mute, crippled), nobody does need them and they live in hospitals or sanatoriums. We are trying to pay attention to them, to help them with clothes and with food, because the government does not have the financial resources for caring for them. These persons begin to see that somebody does need them, they rediscover the meaning of life – they are happy when we come.

In big cities, there are numerous forms of poverty - children from poor or broken families, children who are abandoned by their addicted parents or single mothers who are so busy with their job that they don't have time for educating their children. During the last years we also answer the new need of families with autistic children. This requires working individually with these children, aiming at their inclusion into the society with other non-autistic children and it requires also support for their parents, especially the mums, often abandoned by their husbands.

In Kharkiv the Vincentian Priests run not only the church, but also the large social Centre, where they gather the children from the above described groups of risks for promoting their human and personal development. In this kind of «Afterschool program» children do their homework, are given a hot meal 5 times a week and have the possibility to play. During holidays special programs are organised. Our IAC group is an active agent in the process and effort of the program. We buy the food and our volunteers cook the meals for the children.

It's "visible" how much benefits this "Afterschool program" has brought about during the many years of existence. Children who hated school because of their bad results - and nobody was ready to work with them individually – improved their achievements and now they go to school with pleasure. These children are also less often sick, because they have hot food every day. They mature and develop. They are given the possibility to have a rest and to visit the countryside out of the city. The main effect of our work is that the risk of becoming "street children" has been reduced which means that they are not under the negative influence of the street. After many years we can see that when these children are becoming adults they choose to stick to ethics and good values and they are ready to help the poor. In the context of the current war situation there is constant fear, stress and risk that something bad will happen to these children during the time they spend with us. But the experience of the last months is already showing that having the courage to continue this program in this current situation is decreasing our fear and stress.

Looking at the war conflict in our country, we see also new challenges and new forms of poverty and we try and meet the needs according to our capacities. For example:

- Help to the soldiers who are in the zone of conflict. (The government is not ready to support its own army, but there is a huge movement among the population for collecting food, warm and good clothes and other equipment. People are fully aware that they don't like war, but that not to protect our own country would mean that Ukraine will stop existing).
- Help to refugees (our volunteers help with accommodation, food, things needed when you live in a new place, counselling jobseekers).
- Help to injured people in hospitals.

There are many activists and self-organised groups of volunteers, who are helping refugees and injured people in the war zones. This confirms that our country and nation is united and that we want to live in a peaceful, independent and European Ukraine.

However, despite these difficulties, despite the constant lack of financial resources, despite the small size of our IAC in Ukraine and despite the growing number of poor people we move ahead and observe some positive changes. Although we did not help all poor people in Ukraine, we did help some of them. 1/10 of the population (elderly persons, children and refugees) has become happier, is no more suffering hunger and has got a chance for a better life. This time of war in our country has united us, Ukrainians, and made us proud patriots open to each other, compassionate, ready to help those who are in need.

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## 4. Testimonies of people living in poverty

### The story of Artan (Albania)

It's the first time that I am telling my story in public. My story is similar to that of so many others; it's a story of hope and of meeting people who brought changes in my life.

My name is Artan, I am coming from Albania and I am 30.

My story begins one night in a small boat and ends, for the time being, with my marriage with Maria Grazia who is here with me today.

It was in November 1999 that I left Valona. Albania had been destroyed by dictatorship and civil war making that, over long years, economic and cultural developments had been impossible. Albania was in a chaos, disturbances were the rule and they were still firing in the streets.

I was 15 and I wanted to escape this situation and find a better life. Like other young people I decided to take what seemed to me the only chance. Thus smugglers put me in an inflatable boat and, in one night, I crossed the Adriatic to land in Puglia, at Ostuni, as others had done before.

Once arrived in Turin, I knew, thanks to information provided by other immigrants that I had to go to the Foreigners' Office of the Municipality.

This is where I met Edison, an Albanian Ombudsman, who found me a place where to sleep, a public dormitory called "The House of One World" and where it was possible to stay only overnight. During daytime I went for eating at the canteen of the poor of Cottolengo with other homeless people. I spent a few months in this dormitory.

**After the first days full of enthusiasm and curiosity for this so different world I began feeling deeply uneasy and became homesick; my only thought was to go back home and see my family.**

Meanwhile the municipality had taken care of me and sent me to school. Then, three months later, Edison led me to the New Dawn Community where he too was living. It was then that another life started for me; the other youth were all Albanians, we went together for strolls downtown, were playing football in the field near the Oratory. The volunteers were friendly and nice people. I found there the family dimension that I was missing, and that fun and lightness that any 15 years old boy should have; my homesickness became more bearable.

I went to school and I passed my diploma of primary education in 2000.

In this community I learned how to organise myself, to respect the rules of conviviality, all of which were useful to me afterwards. It started with little things: we were cleaning and cooking in turn and it's in this way that I learned how to keep a household and to prepare meals. I met Alba and Louis, two volunteers who took care of me. Alba for years treated

me like a son, and she was my main reference point and a great example. I wanted them to be both close to me on my wedding day.

At 18, as I had a job, I could find a flat with the help of volunteers and with two other young people coming from Valona who lived with me in the community. The organisational capacity and respect learned in the community were then very useful.

I also undertook a three-year vocational training to become a specialized turner. In 2002 I was hired in a small engineering company, a job that a volunteer had found for me.

**When reaching 20, I took a courageous decision: with my savings and a loan, I bought a flat so as to be able to act as a warrant for my sister who had in the meanwhile obtained a grant for studying in Italy.**

In 2007 Alba made me join a large company that has nevertheless failed in 2012. I then decided to make a new start and to learn a new profession that would give me greater autonomy and now, together with another young man of Valona (a good friend of mine whom I have known in the community), we do electrical installations, a job that I really like.

After all that I could experience a new family life. I achieved to have my brother and my parents joining me in Turin; in a few days, my brother will graduate in economics.

The story does end here, or it rather goes on with my parents living in the same city as me, my brother and my sister slowly building up their future, and Maria Grazia next to me, both happy to start a new life together.

I am proud to have helped my family and achieved my goal. It's clear that I owe a lot to the volunteers of IAC who have always helped and supported me in difficult times as well as in good times. They were for me the point of reference that allowed me to make my experiences backed by the security of having found with them a home and a family.

Presently, I and my whole family have become volunteers in the services of IAC.

### **A special demand made by Francesca (Italy)**

Francesca says that she has lost her job and because of that also her home. She survived thanks to Caritas.

Like many others, she lived in the street and experienced violence. She says "I learned how we, women, we can protect us by ourselves; now, with all what I experienced I could really hate men" she says. "But I want here to speak up for men, to speak of the misery of those who can't act as fathers when they are separated. With the present crisis, many men are living in their car and so they have no possibility to welcome their children; they have no place to stay with them and thus they lose their relationship with their children. It is necessary to create urgently places, flats, where fathers could stay with their children and spend some time with them".



## **Aïcha tells her commitment (France)**

I am living in the biggest social housing in Marseille, built there 45 years ago; 1,200 flats, more than 6,000 people, 33 ethnic groups in 70 buildings, a city in the city! To this description we have to add unemployment, insecurity, illiteracy, promiscuity for some families because children are often remaining long years with their parents, sometimes with spouse and their own children as they don't have the capacity to accommodate themselves.

It's true that in my neighborhood, nobody died from hunger or cold. It's a social housing project, with very few homeless people. **But we all are slowly suffocating because we must month after month, year after year calculate our daily living, again and again, abandoning projects and dreams, praying that no other difficulty, a health problem or else comes to give you the blow...**

Many residents are part-time workers, temporary workers, or minimum wage earners and their poverty is difficult to bear for them. What about a single parent family where the working parent is almost absent from home and in addition doesn't come out. It's double penalty.

Such situations have tragic consequences especially for children (depression, no parental support, school failure, domestic violence...).

**Misery is not only a lack of financial resources, it may take the form of self-deprecation: you can't bring a decent wage home so it means that you are worthless ... it brings a lack of self confidence: you can't do it financially so you really feel unable...**

No money means you have to stop going out, no more social contacts and then why make an effort ... A slow social death.

Parents try to cope and to protect their children but once they are adolescents the social environment gets strong influence. I could often see children looking elsewhere for what they did not find at home and fall into the trap of the street (school drop-out, delinquency, traffic, violence).

This is the picture of poverty in my surroundings.

**Some politicians bring an answer that is desperately maladjusted,** with repression, police, identity controls and others.

Several reasons made that I wanted to become a volunteer: I wanted to meet with other people, to create links and have a social life outside of my home. It was also a way to give back what I got in earlier years when I lived in misery and could get out of it thanks to helps...

By doing good, I make that what is good to happen... I can't stop doing it.

## **A social housing near to Rome (Italy)**

Carla tells her experience in an organisation called UTOPIA, in a remote suburb of Rome where 38 families are living in what is a real ghetto, over 30 km away from the center of the city.

«There are many problems of violence in this place. The organisation was created by a group of women who met for practical exchanges with cooking receipts, needle work and others. They wanted to find a way for getting out of poverty and exclusion. Meeting is a means to combat this imprisonment far away from everything. We also wanted to join our forces for helping our children at school. Good achievements at school are a means to overcome school discrimination and dropping out. **For our children it is very important to go regularly to school; it's their only means to meet with other children and to be a successful student as others are. In so doing they avoid marginalisation**».

Carla underlines how difficult it is for them, in this context of relegation far away from the city, to find a job and thus to get out of poverty, to have contacts with others, a social life beyond the social housing.

## **A young girl describes her home and... tells her dreams (Portugal)**

Good morning, my name is **Ricarda** Marcelino, I'm 15 years old and I am in the 10th grade. I am living in a social district – Chelas-, located in Lisbon. It's here that I grew up, it's here that I learned how to read, to write, and speak correctly, basically it's here that I learned to do everything.

**My district is like others with flats, people, streets, gardens, animals, shops... what changes is the way some people are behaving, because we are not all equal.**

In my neighbourhood, many people are using the food bank because our money is too short for buying everything and we have to manage it carefully. At home we are 6 persons and we have to pay for water, electricity, gas and other expenses. My mother realised that we had not enough for paying everything we needed and now we have the food bank support providing us with every meal, cooked food (soup and dessert), and sometimes also helping us to buy necessary medicines.

In future, I would not want to go through that again, having to manage money very strictly every month and yet it is never enough for satisfying our basic needs.

I wish I had a little more love, from my parents and from people around me; this is why I never show myself one hundred percent to people.

**I hope that in future I will not be hampered by being from where I am living. I know many people who try to find work and they are discriminated against because they live in social housings...They give up and stay at home waiting for social income support. I do not want to be like this!**

I study in a school in the suburbs of Lisbon. I'm taking a Technical Course for Agricultural Production and want to finish school to reach my goal which is to be Minister of Agriculture.

If I achieve my dream I think I'll have a better quality of life and will not have to feel concerned all the time with having enough money to live the next month.

However, what is important is that I will do something that I like.

In this school, on the presentation day, teachers usually ask our name, age, the reason why we have chosen this course and also where we live.

When I say «Chelas», some teachers look at me like if I were from another planet.

My colleagues also stay impressed with certain attitudes that I have, because sometimes I have childish attitudes and they provoke and offend me, «we see that you are from Chelas». I am tired of hearing this and often think to myself: «I am happy with the place where I come from.»

I wish people would respect the place where I live and one day when I go to a job interview I don't want to be discriminated against on grounds of living in Chelas.

I wish people would stop making prejudgements and accept each of us for what we are, not for the place where we live.

Would I like to have grown up in another neighbourhood? NO!

Would I like to change my childhood for another one? NO!

Would I like to change my quality of life? YES!

After all I'm happy, wherever I am!

I want to thank ESAN and the Council of Europe for giving me the opportunity to come here, because many people would like to be in my place and be able to say what they think and what they feel.

I also want to thank IAC for all the support that I have been given over the eight years since we met for the first time.

*We have been told that when she was back to Lisbon, Ricarda could have a talk with the Minister of social affairs and a long talk at the television where she could explain her testimony and her aim.*

## **Sylvie Clausee Contribution to the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter Turin, 16 October 2014**

My name is Sylvie Clausee, I am coming from the street where I lived during 25 years. I have 5 children.

After the death of one of my children I lost foot, I had no work, no housing ..... 25 years in the galleys.

I met the organisation ATD Fourth World in the 70s, at a campsite where I had my tent and where there were also people from the travelers' community. There I met people who were learning how to read and write to Travelers' children; they told me to come and see them at their premises and one day I went there. I was greeted with smiles and a coffee; it gave me a shock - I was no longer considered as a thing. On that day, they were rebuilding a shed and I asked if I could help; they said OK and this was good for me. I met with people who were in the same situation as me and I could talk with them.

Now I'm a member of this Movement, I have found my way, I'm going to meet the most vulnerable people in my city. I do not do the steps for them but I am supporting them, I'm with them so as to make sure that their rights are respected and especially that they are treated with dignity, that the words used to talk to them are not words of contempt and rejection.

What I observe presently is that it is the poorest people who are most affected by the crisis and restrictions. Probably YOU can't see it as it is mainly a series of little new expenses that people have to pay for out of their low income and benefits.

There is in France a threshold over which you have to pay taxes. This threshold is quickly exceeded so that we have to pay the housing tax which is then automatically deducted from our benefit. This means that we will also lose the housing benefit that is necessary for getting accommodation in hotels with furnished rooms. Another measure that penalizes us is that the trade unions fees are no more deductible from the income tax that workers or retired people have to pay.

There are still plenty of other small restrictions that, added together, result in a significant loss of purchasing power and discourage people. **The families say then: what's the point of looking for a flat as we will no longer be able to pay for it and will end up in the street?** THEY are then trying to find a place on a campsite, but often it doesn't work.

Then the only remaining thing is STREET and begging in order to SURVIVE.

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## 5. Synthesis report and some crosscutting remarks

### Synthesis report

#### Peter Verhaeghe,(Caritas Europe)

I have noted four key words in what has been said during this day; here they are:

- **Contribution.** We can observe a kind of mobilisation, an active contribution of all citizens, but this could have a far greater impact if everyone's potential would be better recognised, if nobody would be left aside.
- **Investment.** The States are those who have the capacity to invest and their good management consists in awaiting a good return of their investment. But we observe that they are currently not able to make the necessary social investment with the security of social cohesion as a return.
- **Partnership.** As the third key-word for combating poverty, a partnership implying all stakeholders, that is to say all the organised groups of the society, NGOs and governments, from local to national level. They are contributing to every one's well-being provided that their actions are coordinated and they are acting in the same direction.
- **Projects.** Projects have to be designed and financed on the long term, not just for one year. Combating poverty, supporting each person needs duration in action. It is impossible to have a return on the short term.

I would like to develop here some conditions for getting a good return of social investments.

It has to be taken into account that

- stakeholders have the right to fair return on investment;
- each investment needs a partnership strategy;
- the policies that are implemented need to be consistent and concerted so that one measure is not destroying the others;
- all States should sign and ratify the articles 30 and 31 of the European Social Charter.

These are the conditions making that some change will be brought in the situation of people living in poverty.

## Some crosscutting concluding remarks

The 80 persons meeting during this day, coming from different organisations and from 11 countries have shared d experiences that vary according to the life domains in which they are busy; lawyers, psychologists, sociologists, people with all kinds of professional backgrounds have discussed with persons living or having lived in poverty. **Some common concerns, a great expertise and some statements were highlighted during these exchanges.**

### Five Concerns

Among the expressed concerns the first one was about **employment** for people with no job security. It is particularly difficult to find a job for non skilled persons. The NGOs have all said that, without their network of relationships they would never be able to find a job for those persons who however badly need it. They underline the importance of internships, of finding small jobs making that the persons will slowly become again confident and willing to train in tasks that could lead to available employment at local level. The challenge is to invent a **vocational training** for people who often have had a very short or no schooling and are over the age allowing for access to regular vocational training centers.

The second concern is about **housing**. It is about three main issues: **the right to housing, the effective access** to housing and **town planning**. Different life stories have shown the importance of good town planning. The concern was about planning exclusion....

The third concern is about **food security** which is so necessary for a healthy human life.

The fourth concern is on **access to culture**, which means having access to the language spoken in the country where people are living, access to writing, reading and counting, and above all access to **information**, to having a good knowledge of one's rights.

The fifth concern is about **health care**, especially for children and elderly people.

### NGOs' Expertise

Treasures of expertise have been described often just as normal knowledge based on long practice.

The experience of **networking** was often mentioned as a keyword for civil society organisations working together with foundations and with local authorities. This means that NGOs will be the more creative when they are supported by public policies and funding. Volunteers are considered to act as necessary **mediating** persons between, for example, jobseekers and employers, or foreigners and Housing Offices , children and schools and others.

NGOs also have experienced that assisting people should be avoided and that support should always be built around a **project made together with people themselves**. Starting from a need, as food security, the NGOs make contact with persons who are in difficult situations, they listen to them, develop together strategies of resilience and aim at creating slowly an **alliance** around a project that they have themselves built up.

As to solidarity, a word that is so often misused, NGOs aim at achieving that each one may participate in general actions of solidarity instead of being the object of solidarity actions.

NGOs also underlined the importance of listening to people and say that a real **training of volunteers** is essential in this matter. This was said in particular by persons who lived in poverty and have now become volunteers.

The expertise of NGOs in **repairing the persons' dignity** depends on the creation of a relationship based on exchange. **Gifts have always to be compensated for by restitution**, be it in the form of a service, of an exchange; when it is about money, it can't be a gift but has to be a loan with written conditions for reimbursement; rules of community life have to be respected by all.

## Statements

**The increasing damage caused by poverty to persons** who live in poverty has been highlighted during the meeting:

- For children and youth, poverty is mainly experienced as leading to **discrimination**, especially at school.
- When poverty is persisting, it does produce **exclusion**; people are excluded from employment, housing and social life.
- When poverty is lasting a too long it becomes dehumanizing. People say that they feel abandoned, *forgotten*, useless **nobody does need me**.

**The increasing damage caused by poverty to the society** is questioning INGOs and States as well.

- **Poverty is an illness of the society**
- **Poverty is putting social cohesion in danger**
- **Poverty is a threat for peace.**

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## **6. Message**

### **Message**

**from the event organised by the Conference of INGOs to mark  
the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty  
on 17 October 2014 in Turin**

**to participants in the High Level Conference on the European Social Charter**

At the meeting held by the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe on 17 October 2014 in Turin, participants drew on existing European legal instruments and in particular Article 30 of the European Social Charter to make the following positive observation: legal instruments for combating poverty are available at European level and in the legislation of almost every state. The UN's Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights describe in detail ways of ensuring that the legislation in question is properly implemented.

This legal framework and the strategies put forward for implementing it should have brought about visible improvements in communities across Europe and yet poverty continues to grow, an indication of the powerlessness of national and international institutions to stem the destructive effects that poverty has both on individuals and on social cohesion in the countries concerned.

For their part, NGOs in every country in Europe have drawn not only on this legal framework but also on the expertise of individuals affected by the various forms of poverty to develop effective ways of combating poverty and social exclusion. It is clear from their discussions on 17 October 2014, however, that they are constantly being hampered in their efforts by administrative barriers at local, regional, national and



international level, by sometimes conflicting regulations and by a lack of financial and human resources. Added to this is the devastating impact of austerity policies.

Gathering in the same city, at the same time and for the same cause, European institutions, national governments and NGOs must firmly commit to working together to move beyond the barriers and conclusions about powerlessness to secure the implementation of policies and measures advocated by people who know from experience how the fight for human dignity and against exclusion should be conducted, for themselves and with others.

To this end, we wish to make a number of requests:

- From **European lawmakers**, we expect that the statutory provisions adopted in the economic sphere respect all human rights, whether civil, political, economic or social;
- from **the European Committee on Social Rights**, we expect that they continue developing their enlightened case-law, in particular of Articles 30 and 31 of the European Social Charter;
- from those **states** which have not yet done so, we expect that they ratify these articles together with the Additional Protocol on collective complaints through which INGOs can help states to maintain their efforts to combat poverty;
- from **central, local and regional governments**, we expect that they work together effectively to combat poverty and eliminate prejudice and discrimination, and provide the resources needed for action on the ground;
- from **administrations at all levels and in all areas** (justice, health, education, employment, social services, etc.), we expect that they deal with people living in poverty in a way that respects the full range of human rights and the dignity inherent to all human beings;
- from **all public stakeholders**, we expect that they pay attention and provide support to successful initiatives by people living in poverty in co-operation with civil society organisations.

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