



CONFERENCE OF INGOs  
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
CONFÉRENCE DES ONGS DU  
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

## INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY



### A PARTICULAR DAY

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty was jointly celebrated with the "European Day against Trafficking in Human Beings". Both were marked by the event on the theme: "Precariousness or slavery is not a job", and to add this precision: "A decent and freely undertaken work for ALL, is it possible". Thus over the years, the Council of Europe and the Conference of INGOs, one of the Council of Europe pillars have refined their reflection on the multiple causes of poverty in order to better eradicate it. In 2021, it was about indecent living conditions concerning housing, in 2020 about the situation of children, and in 2019 about the unhealthy life of young people... And every year, on October 17, on the forecourt of the Council of Europe a ceremony pays tribute to the victims of poverty, as proposed by Joseph WRESINKI founder of ATD-Quart-monde. An idea that has its way, the Day having been proclaimed international by the UN in 1992. The 2021 edition of the Council of Europe event was particularly rich in

the commitments on this approach to poverty impacted between the economic aspect (inevitable?) and the unacceptable violation of human rights.

### ON THE FORECOURT

In front of the commemorative slab of the victims of poverty (1), a ceremony was held on the forecourt of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Opened by Gerhard ERMISCHER, President of the Conference of INGOs, the event enabled people who have been victims of trafficking and whose rights to decent work have been violated, to express themselves in the presence of: Ms Marija PEJCINOVIC BURIC, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Harry Alex RUSZ, Chair of the Ministers' Deputies to the Council of Europe, Permanent Representative of Hungary to the Council of Europe, Mr Leendert VERBEEK, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Mr Robert SPANO, President of the European Court of Human Rights, Ms Carole ZIELINSKI, Deputy Mayor of Strasbourg, Ms Eliane CHEMLA, Vice-President of the European Committee of Social Rights (2)

(1) Inaugurated in memory of the victims in 1987.

(2) See extracts from their speeches in this document. They can be consulted in their entirety on the Council of Europe website.

### POVERTY IN EUROPE

Among the speakers on the forecourt, Mrs. E. CHEMLA (who also resides in the French Council of State) indicated that poverty in Europe is increasing in a worrying way. "For the European Union alone, in 2019 there were 72 million poor people in the sense of statistics, that is to say whose income reached not more than 60% of the median income". This corresponds to 17% of the population. However, the differences are notable between groups of people: Thus, "the risk of poverty and exclusion is 22% for women against 20.2% for men. The proportion of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 is 27.8%". According to her, the pandemic has affected new categories of the population. "In France, associations have reported that 45% of people who since 2020 have sought help were pre-

viously unknown to them. And the speaker continued: "Too many countries have not accepted all the relevant articles of the European Social Charter, in particular Article 30 which is the one that deals with all aspects of the fight against poverty". Previously, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mrs PEJ-CINOVIC BURIC, had declared: "Nearly two years ago, I presented to the Committee of Ministers - our member States - a roadmap to reinforce the action of the Council of Europe in this area. Since then, our expert group on combating human trafficking has published a guidance note. Our Committee of Ministers has set up a drafting committee which will prepare a recommendation to governments on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation. (...). So I can't wait to see the text next year and the difference it will make."

Just like the Secretary General, the President of the European Court of Human Rights (1), Robert SPANO, insisted on the fact that there was a violation of human dignity when human beings are trafficked for work. He notably declared: "We must not forget the human stories behind human rights violations that end up in applications to the Strasbourg court: women trafficked as cabaret performers; men trafficked as construction workers; minors trafficked as gardeners in cannabis factories". Human trafficking, by its very nature and its exploitative purpose, is based on the exercise of the power attached to the so-called right of ownership. It treats human beings as commodities to be bought and sold and subjected to forced labour (...). Increasingly high standards are required in the area of the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and we therefore expect more from our Member States in terms of the protection of victims of human rights violations

## TESTIMONIES

The meeting on the forecourt was punctuated by songs from the Council of Europe choir (including "l'Auvergnat" by Brassens) and testimonies from victims of human trafficking. For example, the one by Youssouf and Cléo, from Burkina Faso, working as farm labourers in Italy: "I was in Rosarno.. The work was very hard and they don't pay you right away. Then they scare you. They fire rifle shots not far from where we live. As we have no papers, as our stay is illegal, we are always afraid. I was scared. I ended up leaving, without ever receiving my pay for two weeks of work".

## SPOKESPERSON

**The day continued with testimonies by representatives of more than ten European associations which intervene, on a daily basis, in the field and according to their expertise, in various ways, in the fight against poverty, human trafficking and of all kinds of discrimination. This diversity of approaches is far from resembling an incoherent puzzle.**

The exercise was not easy. The aim was to present in a few minutes a summary of the actions taken, often over many years, in the fight against indecent work by answering two questions: Why should everyone be allowed access to the labour market and to decent work? The second left the analysis to expose a mode of action and proposals: What is already put in place and what needs to be developed to allow everyone to have access to decent work. The panelists fared brilliantly.

First to intervene, **Peter Verhaeghe**, representative of **Caritas Europa**, immediately mentioned the legislative mechanism on which it is necessary to rely: "Decent work has become a universal objective set out in Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), goal 8. According to the ILO, decent work involves opportunities for productive work and offering a fair income, safety in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, to organize themselves and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equal opportunities and treatment for all women and men. The key provisions of the (revised) European Social Charter protect the right to work, to just, safe and healthy working conditions and to fair remuneration." After listing all the breaches of the legislation, the speaker summarises: "All these aspects have one thing in common: a misunderstanding of the value and dignity of work and workers". There are, of course, legislative frameworks in force in most European countries but also common weaknesses : "Among the most common are the lack of childcare and elderly care facilities, the absence of legislation on new atypical forms of employment such as platform workers, the lack of formal recognition education of migrants' qualifications obtained abroad, regularisation programmes for undocumented workers, the absence of a social inclusion programme and the insufficiency of reporting and/or sanctions in the case of discrimination".

According to him, legislative and policy initiatives do not go far enough, in terms of "minimum wages, retrain-

ing and upskilling policies, support for young workers, initiatives to prevent irregular work and sanctions for employers, and the support of social economy actors". Also, for the representative of Caritas Europa, there is still a lot of work to do. "Now is the time for governments to act. We call on the Member States which have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the Revised European Social Charter and all its provisions, and to accept the collective complaints mechanism which is a unique instrument for improving respect for social rights and workers' rights».

## TESTIMONIES

A woman from Madagascar has found a decent job, just like her husband, thanks to a project initiated by ATD Fourth World. She says: "We had no work, my husband did odd jobs when he found some. Me too, when I found laundry to do. We had no savings. As soon as there was a problem, an illness for example, we could not do anything except prepare infusions with different plants. Because of this, very few people visited us. The others avoided us because they were afraid that we would ask them for help. Our situation made us ashamed. Our family life was often full of conflicts and every day was full of worries. Since we took the training and we have work, we have some money. It doesn't cover everything, but our children have enough food and they go to school. We participate in the life of the community according to our means. We are valued by those around us. We meet people, we listen to them and they listen to our advice. It changed our life.

## SPOKESPERSON

"Albania, one of the developing countries of the South-East, is a country of origin and destination of human trafficking", affirms, outright, **Ana STAKAJ**, leader of **Mary WARD LORETO (MWL)** member of **RENATE**. "In isolated rural and semi-urban areas," she adds, "economically disadvantaged young people have been hardest hit by the lack of social support and community activities. The sense of isolation, desperation and aggression creates fertile ground for exploitation, human trafficking and criminal activity in young people to take root and thrive." For her, ending human trafficking "begins with understanding and addressing the economic, social and cultural

issues that contribute to the vulnerability of victims lead to abuse." She emphasizes the vulnerability of an individual or group that can be amplified "by the trafficker to maximize control over the victim". On this subject, she recalls the United Nations protocol on trafficking in persons subjected to a series of specific actions such as recruitment, transport and accommodation for the purpose of exploitation. There is a need, she says, to "strengthen social service providers, eco-



-nomically empower women and youth, and facilitate employment and self-employment opportunities." Regarding the actions to be implemented, she proposes for her association to: "Create a legal service to seek and access the help that people need together with a free therapy service for victims; providing access to education and employment through targeted vocational training;

E-learning to inform young people and women about their rights in order to promote them; vocational training in tourism professions for women and young people in order to offer them employment opportunities".

## SPOKESPERSON

The **European Social Action Network (ESAN)**, for its part, wished to bear witness to the working conditions of young people in Europe and more particularly in Belgium, Spain and France. **Amandine LIARD**, coordinator of the "solidarity with and for young people" programme at ESAN first delivers some observations: "In Belgium, she says, the French-speaking Union of Social Workers reports the very precarious conditions accepted by a large part of the youth because of the need to find a job as soon as possible after leaving school (...).

In France, the young group of the student branch of the Secours Populaire of Val d'Oise makes the same observation: young people are forced to chain short term contracts, with no prospects, with hours unsuited to the pursuit of their studies and often without related to their field of study.

But there is also the impact of poverty on mental health. Representatives of ECAS in Spain already alerted on the subject in 2018. The Student Solidarity Association in Belgium conducted a survey which



revealed that more than half of the students questioned reported psychological problems during the crisis. For lack of money and opportunities, some even turn to prostitution, trafficking and other dangerous activities. (...) Finally, the question of young migrants is underlined by ECAS, the latter for lack of resources and support struggling to find their place in their host society.

Based on these observations, the members of ESAN recall that it is essential for States, in compliance with the Social Charter, to guarantee everyone access to employment with a legal employment contract, fair remuneration and which allows people to live in dignity, a guarantee of access to social rights, safety at work, access to training, decent working time, and protection against moral and sexual harassment at work. Also, the ESAN network encourages to intensify the reflections which must lead to cut the dynamic of "obligatory passage" by precariousness. The action of the European NGOs is essential for the people in precarious situation. They must therefore be better supported. Their skills and expertise are invaluable (...). ECAS believes that it is from adolescence that the question of the future of young people must be asked,



in particular through a reflection on schools which must have more qualified staff and support mechanisms to avoid dropping out and strengthen the orientation of young people (...). Public administrations must put in place more mechanisms to support youth employment, must better protect workers against discrimination in hiring and unequal treatment based on origin, gender, disability, orientation or even physical appearance and state of health, in order to allow everyone equal access to employment.

We call on the various European authorities to pay particular attention to women's access to autonomy (...). With regard to young migrants and asylum seekers, it is essential to guarantee them humane administrative treatment (...). Finally, the ESAN network calls on each of the actors, NGOs, Council of Europe, States, European Union, civil society, to continue to work together to build a social and united Europe".

\* \* \*

## TESTIMONIES

«The Costa Rican pineapples we eat are produced under indecent working conditions. Actions are taken to overturn the balance of power by Peoples Solidaires and its partners by calling on all citizens to mobilize by alerting the media and by challenging political and economic decision-makers. This made it possible to support local trade unions defending the rights of employees. Another example of mobilisation in Cameroon where the Bolloré group is participating in the development of oil palm monoculture with serious consequences for the environment and for communities deprived of land. These mobilisations are articulated with advocacy work, and even in some cases, with legal actions, in order to strengthen the impact and move towards a fairer world".

## SPOKEPERSON

The **Alliance Against Modern Slavery (AMSA) - Stop the Traffik**, (United Kingdom) through its representative, **Rebeka Lisgarten** spoke about the measures to be taken to protect vulnerable workers, in particular seasonal workers working in agricultural sectors, especially those exploited by gangs. She first points to the transparency of the supply chain:

"Many companies have difficulty mapping suppliers. It is easy to cite this lack of transparency as a reason for not intervening. If we promote transparency, access to workers' rights, and clear avenues for remediation and prevention at all levels of a supply chain, infiltrating products or people suddenly becomes more difficult for traffickers." . She stresses that care must be taken that reporting does not put anyone at risk of exploitation or further harm before adding: "Human trafficking is an illegal but extremely profitable activity. The latest statistics (2014) from the ILO estimated its income at 150 billion dollars, of which more than a third in forced labour and in developed countries. If financial institutions are equipped with typologies to identify labour exploitation in financial transactions, then it will be more difficult for exploiters to shift their profits and make it a less reprehensible crime. And if .



*the traffickers could not make or shift their profits, the exploitation of people, including those subjected to forced labour, would decrease dramatically.” The speaker goes on to suggest a few lines of intervention: “Couldn’t we address the company by talking to it more openly about the challenges it faces in mapping and auditing its suppliers? This would allow companies to partner with NGOs that would provide them with actionable insights on how they can reduce their risk of trafficking and labour rights violations. Finally, she indicates that STOP THE TRAFFIK has set up prevention programmes targeting Latin American garbage collectors in the United Kingdom to understand how traffickers were recruited».*

## TESTIMONIES

**Klaus Vanhoutte (PAYOKE association, Belgium)**, testifies: *“Jan recruited Jacob in the Czech Republic and convinced him to follow him to Belgium with the promise that he would find a job there. He made him sign several documents that Jacob did not understand. Jacob worked 12 hours a day. He had to fold leaflets in a garage. In six months of work, he received 1000 €. At first, Jacob was allowed to sleep in Jan’s house. But he was quickly relegated to the garage where he slept on a poor mattress recovered from garbage cans. Jacob was also regularly beaten by Jan. So much so that Jacob fell ill. However, Jan refused to allow him to consult a doctor. Jacob was now locked in the garage. But he wanted to escape. He started begging and got in touch with the elderly couple who accompanied him. Even after leaving Jan’s house, he continued to threaten him. Jacob received advice from PAYOKE and was able to stay in their shelter. The magistrate granted him the status of victim of human trafficking. It was established, according to the court, that Jan took advantage of Jacob’s vulnerable state. Jan was sentenced on January 15, 2020 to an 18-month suspended prison sentence and a fine. Moreover, he was deprived of his civil and political rights”. (1)*

(1) Payoke, one of the three Belgian legal centres founded by the King Baudoin Foundation, was, at European level, a forerunner in the fight against human trafficking. Many countries in Europe have adopted its process of supporting victims of trafficking.

## SPOKESPERSON

On this particular day, it was necessary to turn the gaze towards people who are little talked about in

the media who, moreover, ignore them completely. **Paola Pizzafferri**, project manager for the "Support for imprisoned women" project and director of the **International Soroptimist Union** of Italy, talks about her association's strategy to offer employment and professional skills to prisoners and to support vulnerable groups with empowerment courses that will enable them to find decent work. *“This project covers the whole vision and mission of Soroptimist International, as its objective is the professional training of inmates in different fields, urging them to begin a personal development in order to be able to enter the labour market. (...) With a focus on social rights, education and women’s empowerment Soroptimist International promotes two goals of the 2030 Agenda: quality education and gender equality. (...). The period of imprisonment should prepare them to reintegrate into society. (...) Since 2017, 52 Italian clubs and 200 members have carried out 80 training sessions with, at the end, certificates in 34 Italian prisons. (...) The participants have received training as a hairdresser, beautician, pastry chef, seamstress, designer, “roaster”, cleaning lady, beekeeper, gardener, librarian, decorator... Many partner companies have taken part in the project (... ) The integration of incarceration into vocational training has a very positive impact on preventing recidivism.”*

## SPOKESPERSON

**Jean-Michel Libion and Denys Cordonnier** spoke as perfect duettists. The first speaker underlined that "Job deprivation is a scandal, a waste, a suffering and it generates many harmful consequences for people and for relationships between people (looks, judgments. ...). The second speaker, representing the project **“Territory Zero Long-term unemployed”** underlined that *“the cohesion of a society comes from a base of proclaimed and respected rights.*

*Access to employment is part of it”. The first speaker recommends going out to meet people deprived of employment. You need “tailor-made, because there are fears to overcome. Many have the feeling of having been cheated by being forgotten either on the job side, or by going into “devices” or “promises” that only lasted a while. The second speaker affirms that it is necessary to build together the principles that “no one is unemployable” and that of “leave no one behind”,*



concepts that should be put into action. According to D. Cordonnier, "there are a lot more potential jobs than you might think. But, we must also act so that, for each person, one or more jobs correspond to him. To do this, it is useful to bring together the ex-deprived of jobs and useful jobs". Finally, J.M. Libion explains for his part "that we must create work collectives that provide real security and a corporate culture that respects everyone as they are. All this is only possible if there is a real convergence of the will of the actors of the territory. That is to say the essential role of all the actors".

## SPOKESPERSON

Last speech of this day which will have been rich in analyses and proposals, by the voice of **Francesca Albertoni**, **ELISAN** representative (European Network for Inclusion and Local Social Action) for Veneto-Italy. From the outset, she declares: "According to our observatory, labour exploitation of the most vulnerable people has become more and more widespread and now involves all the regions of our country. Initially reserved for the agricultural and textile sectors, situations of semi-slavery abound in all areas of activity. There are several degrees of exploitation. This ranges from the absence of a regular contract - lack of safety conditions, non-compliant working hours, lack of rest - days off, illness, breaks, direct deduction by the employer of part of the salary for boarding and lodging expenses- up to situations of pure and simple slavery with seizure of documents, the victim being at the disposal of the employer 24 hours a day.



*The first tool to combat this phenomenon is to make people aware of their fundamental rights, to raise awareness that must be passed on to the entire community(..)*

*With regard to the severe exploitation of the migrant population, the process of social inclusion begins with entry into the labour market. Work promotes the construction and recognition of an identity (...). It is therefore not only a source of income, but a place of personal development, exchange, relationships, and the acquisition of independence. Work is therefore fun-*

*damental for integration, social inclusion, empowerment, freedom and dignity. On the contrary, the absence of employment with a real contract increases the risks of vulnerability and marginalisation".*

**Federica Irene Molinaro**, another social actor for the Veneto region, brings her contribution concerning public policies aimed at giving vulnerable groups the means to access the labour market: "This objective is to be linked with other measures concerning access to training, housing and education. This is why the political framework of our regional plan is inspired by international and European principles, in particular the European Social Charter. The plan is a multidimensional approach to eradicating poverty by promoting pathways to social inclusion, empowerment of beneficiaries and active support for employment (...) Two types of interventions can be activated: internships in companies whose aim is to overcome the difficult situation through personalised social and professional activation projects. And then social support for people in difficult situations with socialisation or resocialisation courses. We can thus see that increasing social inclusion has a positive impact on everyone. This is why public authorities should put in place dynamic policies aimed at promoting social protection and the inclusion of all citizens in a marginalised situation". A very nice conclusion for this special day.

*Design, model, production: René Ledermann (European Social Action Network -ESAN) Photos: Pierre Klein. (DR-Europe ATD- Fourth World)*

. Participants in the second part of the day (1) called on Council of Europe member states to:

- adopt legislation prohibiting all forms of trafficking in human beings and to take measures to prevent this crime, by allowing everyone to have access to decent and freely consented work (see the example of the "TZCLD - Zero Territories long-term unemployed") and to be informed of the dangers and risks of sexual exploitation in the country or abroad.
- learn by example by taking inspiration in particular from the Legal Centres for accompanying visits to human trafficking, which has led the public authorities to increase the resources of the services involved and to give victims a legal status in the longer term.
- Legislate to prohibit the marketing of products manufactured under conditions that do not respect human rights.
- apply Article 17 of the Revised European Social Charter relating to young people's access to education and training leading to adequate pay and decent work.

(1)Day organised by the Conference of INGO through the Comity « Actions for social rights»