



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

**International day for the eradication of poverty  
The civil society facing child poverty in Europe  
Strasbourg, 16th October 2015**

**Programme**

**Opening and keynote speakers**

**Anna Rurka**, President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe

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

**Giuseppe Palmisano**, President of the Committee of Social Rights

**The Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child**

**Agnes Von Maravic**, secretary to the Expert Committee of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child

**Panel 1 The impact of poverty on children 's health**

« **Enfants d'Europe, Le Furet**, » *Marie-Nicole Rubio* Raising awareness on poverty and exclusion among those who work with small children

**Doctors of the World**, Martine Schmelck Poverty and its consequences on children

**International Association of Charities (AIC- IAC)**, *Maritchu Rall* Malnutrition, a case study in Spain

**Panel 2 The impact of poverty on school and access to culture**

**International movement ATD Fourth World**, *Dominique Destouches* « a successful school for all»

### **Panel 3 How children and youth are living**

**FITRAM**, Ass Evidence et Ass Lianes *Patricia Arnoux, Evelyne Maréchal*  
Presentation of a video on animal mediation in the relationship with children living in precarious conditions.

**Instituto de Apaio a Criança, IAC**, *Paula Paço* « Building up together, parents, social workers, children... »

**The Home for Children**, *Ryszard Michalak* An experience with street youth  
« Far beyond short solutions “

**Eurochild**, *Luca Merotta* Realising children’s rights through empowering their families.

### **Panel 4 Supporting children**

**Association Thémis**, *Josiane Bigot* The voice of children from poor families facing the courts.

**High School of Social Work** (Strasbourg ESTES) *Guillaume Joseph* Changes in the training of social workers for tackling poverty and social exclusion

**European Social Action Network** (ESAN), Movement “Guys of the World”  
*René Ledermann* « These holydays preparing good future »

### **Conclusions**

**Caritas Europa**, *Peter Verhaeghe* The ten recommendations for combating child poverty in the EU

**INGO Conference of the Council of Europe**, *Anna Rurka* Conclusions and input in the Action Plan of the Conference

12h30 **Commemoration of the International Day for the eradication of poverty** at the Palais de l’Europe with testimonies brought by children from the organisation “Regard d’Enfants” and the contributions of Madame Astrid Helle, ambassador for Norway at the Committee of Ministers and the city of Strasbourg representative

Visit of the exhibition organised by Caritas **Let’s listen to the voice of children living in poverty**. Hall of the Palais

**16 October 2015**

**Opening** **Anna Rurka**, president of the Conference of INGOs having participative status at the Council of Europe.

It's my great pleasure to open this day with the participation of Mme Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe together with Mr. Giuseppe Palmisano, President of the Committee of Social Rights. But allow me to say right now at the beginning my thanks to the Working Group led by Maritchu Rall and Jean-Gabriel Prieur. I know the many meetings they organised for preparing this day intended to be an opportunity for working together and preparing a bigger event, next year, in Poland or in another country. The dynamic of these conferences organised on the 17th October every year shows the commitment of the Council of Europe together with the Conference of INGOs for tackling the issue of poverty and specially poverty experienced by children.

I have now the honour to welcome here Mme Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe and Mr Giuseppe Palmisano, President of the Committee of Social Rights. My warm thanks to you for being here with us despite your very big agenda and I give you the floor immediately.

### **Introductory Contributions**

#### **Madame Battaini-Dragoni**

It is my pleasure to speak to you this morning.

The Council of Europe is an international institution built on law. We are an Organisation with lots of ambassadors, parliamentarians, lawyers and officers, all of them high skilled in their domain and committed to human rights and human dignity.

We all know, here in Strasbourg, how important and necessary it is for our work to be kept in touch with what happens at grass roots level, in the daily life of the Europeans we want to serve. We need this mirror and it is in this matter that you, INGOs achieve a particularly important task. You are one of the pillars of the Council of Europe, you

bring to our debate your special and pragmatic views on the issues on which we work and you deserve our thanks for this; I wish you a lot of courage for your work.

I want to thank you also for having chosen this important topic for your conference. It is a difficult issue. The economic crisis and the austerity that followed are hurting badly children and youth in Europe.

Should I discuss the way in which democratically elected governments are managing their public finances?

Should I condemn each cut made by a State in its public expenses?

No, but what I am convinced of, -and it is really our mission-, is that we have to avoid that the coming generation will have to pay for the mistakes made by the present generation. In times of crisis all societies have to make sacrifices. But it should be up to the strongest ones to bear the heaviest burden.

Facts and figures are worrying. Some examples:

Statistics of the EU show that, over the last years, in all member States it is children who were the most exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion, more than other groups. They are the most vulnerable, more than adults, even more than the elderly. The UNESCO also states: over the last years child poverty increased in 20 of the 32 member States of the Council of Europe scrutinised in a recent report.

The problem is not limited to the less wealthy countries. In Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and Luxemburg one child out of six does experience poverty. In the UK it is one child out of four.

Some groups are particularly exposed to poverty, I mean children of migrants: their situation is a crucial problem because of the flood of refugees these last months. We have similar worries for children living in single parent families and for Roma children who experience special difficulties because of the segregation they are suffering.

This week I heard that the ECRI, our Commission against racism and intolerance, had again to point to this problem of segregation of Roma children, this time, in the Czech Republic

Children growing up in poverty are more than others at risk to become parents living in poverty. Like prosperity and success opportunities that are transmitted from one

generation to the other as a high valued family good, poverty is transmitted too and becomes a vicious circle that is difficult to break.

If we don't want to see these facts, if we accept that young people are making up a generation that is lost, it will be of no use to save our banks, to absorb our deficits or to pay back our sovereign debts. The damages caused by the economic crisis will be deeper and more sustainable than our most pessimistic forecasts.

Then, let's change our aim. Let's act with more strength so as to guarantee to all children the prospect of a safe and decent life.

The Council of Europe approach is based on the rights of the child. Children are full human rights holders. Our action is resolutely placed within the framework of our European Convention on Human Rights and our European Social Charter. With the programme "Building a Europe for and with children" launched in 2006, we help States to develop the policies that are necessary for complying with the obligations listed in these fundamental texts.

Let me underline here something that is very important: in the present context the European Social Charter is of particular importance. Its article 30 provides for a right to protection against poverty and social exclusion and it applies to all, without any distinction of age.

The Charter also contains clauses that are specially intended for youth with a view to ensuring their right to social, legal and economic protection. The European Committee of Social Rights helps the States to implement this Charter by protecting the rights of young people to employment, taking actions in other essential matters as access to housing, education and vocational training and ensuring economic protection of the family especially by means of benefits for children, just to give some examples.

What is particularly relevant for your work is the Additional Protocol of the European Social Charter concerning collective complaints.

Why is this Protocol so important? The collective complaint procedure provides that INGOs, trade unions, employers' unions and other representative bodies may submit problems to the Committee on behalf of groups of persons directly concerned.

This procedure is efficient and has been used recently precisely for denouncing the employment of children. These children themselves would never have made a claim to the European Court of Human Rights and their parents wouldn't have done so for them. The procedure of the Charter allowed other persons to take action, to defend

the interests of these children and to obtain changes in their situation. It is more than justice for one particular child, it is the life of a whole group of children that has been improved.

Within the framework of the new strategy of the Council of Europe for the period 2016-2021 we will still more insist on the European Social Charter in our exchanges with member States and put more emphasis on the measures to be taken by the States when implementing the conclusions and decisions of the Committee in matters concerning children. The Secretary General has given a high priority to the Charter and I call on all of you for helping us to accomplish this mission.

The Council of Europe supports the States for complying with their legal obligations but it also devotes a great part of its activities to promoting good practices and disseminating guidelines in the member States. It may be, for example, developing concepts of social and health services adapted to children, making that children living in the most disadvantaged groups have access to school, to decent housings and ensuring the social integration of street children.

I will conclude now:

Eradicating poverty and social exclusion of children is, of course, not an easy task. We need to take a multidimensional approach aimed at equal opportunities for all our children and full respect of their fundamental rights.

Four actions have to be given high priority:

1. Making more investments in children and reinforcing prevention
2. Providing income helps, as family benefits but also, in so doing, avoiding inactivity trap and labeling
3. Ensuring equal access to the services that are paramount for the children's future as early childhood services and education services; this means eliminating school segregation and improving access to social and health services and housing.
4. Finding quickly appropriate means for integrating children of migrants and refugees in the school system so as to realise what is our big challenge: their inclusion.

In all these fields of action we need your help. We have a strong cooperation with the States and bring them our support, but we also challenge them with our requirements. In the same way we expect to be faced with your requirements.

Tell us which levels we could operate with the Committee of Minister and the Parliamentary Assembly for making that things move on at ground level.

Tell us which should be, according to your experience, the most important programmes to implement in our bilateral activities with the member States

Tell us how to work hand in hand and in the most efficient way with the civil society.

I hope that this meeting will allow to deepen our relationship and also to facilitate partnerships between your organisations.

As I said at the beginning of this contribution, you are here because you have a particular and pragmatic approach of the problem. So, don't hesitate to share your experience. I am sure that you will have very good exchanges and I look forward to know the results of your work very soon.

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#### **Giuseppe Palmisano, President of the European Committee of Social Rights**

Let me say how pleased I am to be here with you for this conference organised by the civil society in the framework of the International day for the eradication of poverty and addressing poverty experienced by children in Europe. I am very happy to be given the opportunity to speak to you and to do so just after the President of the Conference of INGOs and the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Poverty and exclusion of children is a deep concern for all of us; we are indeed convinced that we have to join our efforts for combating this phenomenon that has been worsened by the economic crisis in our continent.

I want to stress here that the participation of the Committee of Social Rights in the events organised by the Conference of INGOs each year for the refusal of misery has become a tradition.

I want also to congratulate the Working Group "Poverty and Human Rights" of the Conference of INGOs for having chosen the topic on which we are working today. As we all know, the International Committee for the 17<sup>th</sup> October has chosen for this year 2015 to focus on "Building up a sustainable future and join for eradicating poverty and discrimination". The Conference of INGOs looks with deep concern at the future of children who live in poverty. Indeed, as Anthony Lake, Director General of UNICEF said

in 2013, sustainable development begins when children grow up with security, good health and good education.

Now, poverty deprives children from their rights. The surroundings in which they are living don't protect them any longer. Bad treatment and exploitation are often linked to this fact. Deeply rooted poverty causes bad health and malnutrition. It causes psychological and physical disorders that children will have to bear for their whole life. They can't be confident in their future. Poverty tends to be transmitted from one generation to the other and this is why we have to look very carefully after each child and to provide for his/her good future.

The European Social Charter is the main European treaty about children's rights. It protects the rights of children in many circumstances, from birth to adult life. These rights are provided for in two ways:

- First, a number of rights listed in the Charter apply implicitly also to children; as, for example, article 16 (the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection) that protects the rights of children as members of the family and article 11 (the right to protection of health);
- Secondly, the Charter contains specific rights, only for children as article 7 (the right of children and young persons to protection) and article 17 (the right of children and young persons to social, legal and economic protection).

Children who live in vulnerable families, children belonging to minority groups and also children living without residence papers in the country are among those who need the more to be protected, in particular in these times of economic insecurity that Europe experiences presently.

In 2009 the European Committee of Social Rights has adopted its interpretative opinion on the implementation of the European Social Charter in the context of the global economic crisis. In this document the Committee declared that the important financial and economic crisis of 2008 and 2009 has had a severe impact on social rights as the right to health, social security, and social assistance.

The Committee stressed that the economic crisis should not have as a consequence to weaken the protection of the rights that are recognised in the European Social Charter. This means that governments have to take all necessary measures for ensuring the effective protection of these rights when the beneficiaries need them the more. Children are among these beneficiaries.

The Committee is aware of the fact that, in such difficult times, the States may be obliged to take measures aimed at strengthening their public finances in order to uphold and sustain their social systems. However, the States have to pay a special attention – so says the Committee- to the impact that their choices will have on the most vulnerable groups especially on families (*mutatis mutandis, International Association Autism-Europe v. France, complaint n ° 13/2002, decision on the merits 4 November 2003*).

In this respect the Committee judged that even when the general standard of living of the population is affected by the changes that the governments are making for facing situations of crisis, they should be careful and make sure that such reforms don't bear heavily on the most vulnerable households. (*Conclusions XIV-1, Finland*).

The Committee considers that the States should take all possible steps for respecting the rights of particularly vulnerable children as, for, instance, children living without residence papers in the country and children with disabilities.

In addition, the Committee observes that when the effective exercise of a right is exceptionally complex and particularly costly, the State party should try and reach the objectives of the Charter within a reasonable period of time, with measurable progress and by using its available resources in the best possible way

(*International association Autism-Europe (AIAE) v. France, complaint n ° 13/2002, decision on the merit 4 November 2003*).

The Committee pays a special attention to the situation of isolated children, children without residence papers, and children in families experiencing financial difficulties. The Charter provides for all children, including those who are alone or unlawfully within the territory, the right to care and assistance together with medical assistance.

(*Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme (FIDH) v. France, complaint n ° 14/2003, decision on the merit September 2004*). Care and assistance should be ensured by the State in which isolated children are living or when parents can't give this assistance.

Referring to the article 17 of the Charter that sets positive obligations to the States party as to housing, basic care and protection of children and young people, the Committee asserts that the States have to take the necessary and appropriate measures so as to ensure that children get the care and assistance they need and to protect them against neglect, violence or exploitation that are seriously threatening their exercise of the most fundamental rights as the right to life, the right to psychophysical integrity and to respect of their human dignity (*Défense des Enfants International (DEI) v. Belgium, complaint n ° 69/2011, decision on the merit 23 October*

2012). It is up to the States not only to take legal measures but also to provide for the financial resources and necessary procedures so as to facilitate the full exercise of the rights that are guaranteed under the Charter (*Mouvement international ATD Quart Monde v. France, complaint n ° 33/2006, decision on the merit 5 December 2007*).

The Committee pays a special attention to the right to appropriate family benefits as a means preventing that the family could become poor and as - a consequence- that children would experience misery. Among the positive obligations set to the States under article 16 there are measures ensuring economic protection for different types of vulnerable families. States have in particular to guarantee the economic protection of the family by appropriate means. Family benefits or benefits for children have to be provided by the social security system that may be, according to the States, either open to all individuals or with means tested access.

We should also remember that the Charter guarantees the right to free primary and secondary education for all children, including those coming from vulnerable families.

Poverty is a state of destitution caused by the lack of resources. The article 30 of the Charter is the first binding provision in human rights legislation guaranteeing a protection against poverty and social exclusion. It is based on the idea that living in a situation of poverty and social exclusion is undermining the human being's dignity (*Conclusions 2005, Observation for the interpretation of article 30*).

For ensuring the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, this article 30 requires the States to adopt a overall and coordinated approach; this needs to be done with an analytical framework setting a series of priorities together with the corresponding measures so as to prevent and suppress the barriers that hinder people's access to their fundamental social rights. Monitoring mechanisms should also exist implying all concerned stakeholders, inclusive representatives of the civil society and of persons experiencing poverty and social exclusion (*Conclusions 2003, Observation for the interpretation of article 30*).

In 2004 the Service of the Social Charter has written a brochure having as title "the Charter and the right to be protected against poverty and social exclusion"; it contains detailed information on the case-law of the Committee of Social Rights in this matter. This brochure is at your disposal.

I would like to insist on the fact that the European Social Charter is a strong instrument, strong enough for protecting all of us in our daily life. I am happy to say that the Conference of INGOs is very actively promoting the Charter since many years.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe has made the European Social Charter one of his priorities for his second mandate. This priority goes along with the “Turin process” launched at the high level conference that took place in this city in October 2014. The aim of this process is to make use of the whole potential of the European Social Charter with a view to improving the respect of all fundamental social rights.

This process has the following specific aims:

- To guarantee social rights in times of crisis, to promote the acceptance of the revised European Social Charter by the States that are still linked to the 1961 Charter, to promote also the ratification of the articles that they have not yet accepted as well as the collective complaint procedure.
- To maximise the potential of synergies between European Union law and the European Social Charter
- To ensure coherence in the protection of fundamental social rights and to enhance the ruling system of the Charter within the Council of Europe
- To involve national parliaments in the protection of the rights contained in the European Social Charter

We should consider how national NGOs and INGOs could contribute to the development of the “Turin process” especially for children and the fight against poverty. It is not necessary, in this house, to mention the key role played by the civil society in the protection of children’s rights. It is quite impossible to list the answers that the civil society is able to bring to this issue; there are plenty of them. The European Social Charter is an exceptional opportunity for the civil society to act directly, through the collective complaint procedure, for combating poverty and for the respect of children’s rights, including the rights of those who live in poverty. It is now up to all States to accept this mechanism. For the time being, only 15 States have done so. But here again the civil society has its part to play – making politicians aware how important it is to accept this mechanism for reinforcing and ensuring the respect of human rights.

The civil society, facing children’s poverty in Europe, for coming back to the topic of this meeting, has to rely on the European Social Charter based on deeply humanistic values as justice, dignity, solidarity, participation for all, and non-discrimination. This will help vulnerable persons to have access to their fundamental social rights and will promote action against poverty and exclusion.

I wish you courage and success on this road and thank you for your attention.

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## **Anna Rurka**

When I prepared myself for this morning several questions came to my mind. As a teacher in social work I observe that social workers have a more and more humanitarian mission. How is it possible that in such a rich world extreme poverty still does exist? How can we bear the fact that, in our 21st century there are still so many people victims of poverty?

When trying to understand this situation I find figures and connections, sociological features, explaining variables, all things that are satisfying for the researcher but that, precisely because they explain the phenomenon are backing the very existence of poverty. What may be understandable for science is not understandable for the human being.

Malnutrition is causing the death of 3.1 million of children under 5 each year, which means nearly half of the causes of death (45%). There are 795 million persons suffering hunger in the world, 1 person out of 9. If farm workers had the same access to resources as the other inhabitants of the earth, the number of persons suffering hunger would diminish by 150 millions, - according to the figures of the UN world programme for food.

Now, if we have the necessary resources, what is then the cause of poverty?

The system we have built up allowing today that a small minority is holding the great majority of available resources is not a good system. Instead of helping populations, it does weaken the economy of the poorest countries despite the fact that they are rich in natural resources.

Such paradoxical situations are also to be observed in our industrialized societies: children in the poorest families are those who are the more exposed to the risk of overweight. All well known factors leading to obesity are multiplied in vulnerable populations with the usual consequences: food problems, chronic diseases, poor self esteem and others.

There is another subject that worries me; it is these young people who are among the group of population that suffers the most of the economic crisis. In the States' public policies there is now a new category: the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), young people between 15 and 24. In the EU countries there are 7.5 millions youth in this situation, which means an increase by one million in 5 years. Is this really a problem for us?

We can also read that in over one third of OECD countries public expenses for education have been cut down since 2010. I will not tackle this issue here; it is an obvious and despairing reality. In addition we will not improve people's situation if we reduce the struggle against poverty to a strategy aimed only at improving inclusion in employment.

There is, in addition, the issue of forced work for children that does exist also in member States of the Council of Europe. More and more children escaping war are victims of contemporary slavery, trafficking and exploitation.

Within the framework of its strategy for the rights of the child the Council of Europe has developed a large programme for acting together against child poverty. INGOs participated in this work and will be committed in its implementation, especially by raising awareness among their national member organisations.

### **The Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child**

**Agnes von Maravić**, Division of children's rights Slide presentation

Before presenting the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child I want to picture the context and first listen with you to children telling how they feel poverty.

#### **What does it mean for children to live in poverty?**

The Council of Europe together with the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) has made a series of videos on how poverty looks like in children's daily life. These videos highlight the inequality of people, especially of children, in some big cities in Europe.

Quotes from this project „Austerity Bites“

*Kishan, The Hague: More and more people in The Hague now rely on food banks to avoid hunger. My family is one out of many.*

*Kimberley, Ghent: More and more families in Belgium live in cramped conditions. It's hard to be a girl, growing up with no personal space and no privacy.*

In these two quotes we feel the sense of shame of these children.

*Giulio, Jacopo and Valerio, Rome: Sport facilities in Rome have become too expensive for many young people. Access to sport clubs is beyond our reach and there are few open spaces where we can play.*

The video shows how these children are trying to play football in a parking where, of course, it is forbidden.

Kat, Preston: *Cuts in Family Support Services mean that I no longer have transport to take me to see my birth parents and so I see them less often. I miss them.*

Spyros, Athens: *Many of my friends have left Greece because of the crisis. I miss them.*

In these last two quotes we see the sadness of these children and also their anger. It should not be our only motivation for doing something about poverty. May be it is a motivation for politicians as anger could result in group action, but child poverty is something that is felt at very individual level. Children's rights are important as they consider children in their present life, not only as becoming adults, not only for their future.

We have to be aware also that poverty is a phenomenon experienced from generation to generation.

### **Shame, sadness and anger: what can we do? What does the Council of Europe do?**

We have several bodies tackling the issue of poverty:

- European Court of Human Rights : individual requests have been lodged on the removal of children from their home because of economic reasons. This should never happen and is forbidden by European treaties, so judged the Court.
- European Committee on Social Rights : with a collection of case-law based on collective complaints
- Parliamentary Assembly
  - Resolution and Recommendation on “The sacrificed young generation: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis” (2012)
  - Resolution and Recommendation on “Ending child poverty in Europe” (2014)
- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities :
  - Report and Resolution on “Championing children’s rights in times of austerity” (2015)
- Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
  - Safeguarding human rights in times of economic crisis (2013)

The next slide presented shows the result of a long work for preparing a common strategy that will hopefully be adopted in January or February 2016

### **The Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child**

Priority areas in the draft Strategy 2016-2021 are:

1. Equal opportunities for all children - this is a new item that covers social aspects and provides for assessing the measures that are undertaken
2. Participation of all children
3. A life free of violence for all children - This was the main pillar of the last ten years with a focus on domestic violence
4. Access to justice for all children -This priority action will consider establishing guidelines for helping children before the courts and especially young people in detention.
5. Children's rights in the digital environment -This is a new challenge and an area where child protection is necessary.

Equal opportunities for all children:

I want to give some details on this priority as it is probably the most interesting for you.

The aim is:

- To follow-up the conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights
- To support the implementation of the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers "On child-friendly social services" (2012) and "On access to social rights of young people from disadvantaged groups " (2015)
- To promote EC Recommendation "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage" (2013)
- To support child impact assessments

We are looking for actions to which we can commit to, looking for concrete objectives to be assessed regularly. We have to find solutions by cooperating at national and local level.

### **How can NGOs be involved in this strategy?**

By providing Information

By working in co-ordination with the Council of Europe Conference of INGOs and specialized organisations as Eurochild, Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) , Save the Children

By having common projects on

- Training material on rights and participation of children for care professionals working in alternative care programmes (with SOS Children's Villages International)
- Methods for assessing places for the deprivation of liberty of children (with Defence for Children International Belgium)
- Capacity building of national NGO networks on children's rights (with Eurochild, from 2016 on)

We have little money but a common project: Building Europe for and with children.

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**Anna Rurka** added two important points to this presentation of the Council of Europe Strategy on the rights of the child:

- The first point is about the Court of Human Rights; INGOs should better support children, especially in matters dealing with the placement of children outside of their family. Some treaties forbid this practice and nevertheless States are still allowing placements to be decided and we are backing them with our silence. Such placements are decided on the grounds of "educational deprivation" but this is just a way for hiding the real reason which is poverty. Nobody looks at the real origin of such deprivation.
- The second point is about the Lanzarote Committee and its campaign 1/5 on children victims of violence. There will be a working group on this issue within the Conference of INGOs bringing together judges, lawyers, social workers and teachers; they will work on identifying the barriers hindering the children's access to justice.
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## **A good practice mentioned during the discussion:**

Léon Dujardin ( ESAN) stresses the importance of sport for children and young people. Sport is unfortunately often too expensive for some of them. It is up to NGOs to call on enterprises for taking action. It is now years that some enterprises provide each year for the subscription of children to the sport club of their choice.

## **Panel 1 the impact of poverty on children's health**

### **Working with early childhood Association Le Furet**

#### **Marie-Nicole Rubio**

This contribution begins with two remarks. The first one is on vocabulary. We should never talk about "poor children", because children, on the contrary, are very rich persons, but some of them "live in poverty".

The second remark, - as Mme Battaini said she is expecting our requests- , so this remark is that nothing is made at the Council of Europe for 0 to 6 years old children. Why only undertake actions at school age? The first years of life are so important. The rights of the child should be protected for very small children and even before birth.

The NGO "le Furet" was created in 1998 with the aim to combat discrimination and exclusion from early childhood on. It is obvious that small children share the bad living conditions of their parents. There is a kind of paradox in our societies. On the one hand, we have to work in emergency for making that families may live in decent conditions and on the other hand we have to combat the slowness of authorities and policies.

Now, many studies have shown how important it is to give a quick and holistic answer to small children's needs. What do they need?

They need:

- Adapted health care and good and varied food
- Warm and securing emotional relationships and this is not easy to achieve when parents are in dire need, lost in material difficulties, in living conditions that don't allow for having time for their child.

- Enough opportunities for developing language and cognitive skills

It is clear that this supposes a holistic approach as the three levels of needs are interdependent.

It is also well known that the first years of life are marking the child with impressions that will be difficult to remove later on.

The OECD, in a programme run in 2000 called “Small children, big challenges” has drawn two very meaningful opposite curves. The one, upwards, shows that the child’s language skills are growing according to the child’s living conditions. The second curve, downwards, shows that financial means are diminishing while the urgent necessity to meet children’s needs is growing.

The NGO Le Furet has opened places in Strasbourg where parents and children can stay together. These places respect the parent-child relationship, they are open to everybody without any registration; it is not necessary to show identity papers, to answer questions, to tell one’s misery; just push the door and come in, but even this is sometimes extraordinary difficult.

Our organisation is spreading out its ideas and proposals beyond regional level and reaches national level with booklets and vocational training activities. At the beginning of the years 2000 a network of editors “Children in Europe” has been created by Peter Moss and, without a penny European money, published 29 journals and a declaration presenting the basis of a European culture of early childhood care that should be overall, free of charge and online with the rights of the child.

**A good practice:** creation in Strasbourg of a micro-crèche called “the small home” for children whose parents have no or no more identity papers. It is a place where the child may stay every day in the week, a safe place, like an anchor for these families living in very precarious conditions, often homeless and not knowing where to go.

## **The consequences of poverty on children’s health    Doctors of the World**

### **Martine Schmelck**

It is very difficult to measure the impact of poverty on children’s health as there are many aspects to be considered. I will use, for this contribution, the last report presented by Doctors of the World in May 2015 in London. It is based on 42 000 social and medical consultations for 23 000 patients met in 25 cities in 10 European States. This report stressed the general impact of the crisis.

Just two examples: the poverty rate for children in Greece escalated dramatically from 23% in 2008 up to over 40% in 2012 and in Spain it has increased from 28% in 2008 to over 36% in 2012.

Looking at the impact of the crisis on children, I will start with the situation of pregnant women because it is already there that difficulties are beginning for the child, even before being born.

I am sorry, but here again I have to give some figures. The report says that, among over 37% out of pregnant women living in poverty in Europe who have been looked after by Doctors of the World, they were over one half having no access to antenatal consultation.

- The great majority had no access to a social security system (83%)
- 89% were living with less than the poverty threshold
- 55% were living in temporary housings

We have to consider, in addition, the complex administrative process for accessing to health care, language barriers and, because of their precarious administrative situation 2/3rds of pregnant women living in the 10 assessed States are not consulting for fear to be arrested.

This altogether represents a potential risk for their children. The last OECD data between 2008 and 2012 show an increase in birth of children with small weight and doctors also speak of a significant increase of dead-born children.

There are also other risks for pregnant women living in poverty and for their child when they have no access to healthcare:

- Transmission of HIV and hepatics C from the mother to the child
- No detection of sexually transmitted disease that could lead to spontaneous abortion or to premature birth.
- Lacking early detection of anemia or diabetes
- Lack of preparation to birth, no contraception after birth, lack of information about breast-feeding.

It may be useful to quote here the WHO position saying that: “access to antenatal care in **a right** for all pregnant women. As a consequence, the interventions that are scientifically considered to be useful have to be delivered **to all and free of charge**”.

Once children are born, the main issue is about vaccination. 38% out of the mothers contacted for the report didn't know where to go for the vaccination of their child (many public centres have been closed because of lacking financial resources).

Out of the 645 children considered in the report, only 42% were vaccinated against tetanus and 34% against measles, mumps and rubella, whereas the vaccination rate against measles is up to 90% in the general population of children under 2 years.

These figures show the difference existing between the population as a whole and those children met by Doctors of the World concerning vaccination.

Such lack of vaccination may become a barrier for attending school. In Spain, for instance, vaccination and care card are compulsory for school registration. This means that being excluded from the health care system may lead to exclusion from the school system.

We have to remember also another aspect of vaccination which is a public health issue: many vaccinations are protecting not only individuals, but also the whole community through the mechanism of collective immunity: when a child is vaccinated the family around this child is protected too. For this mechanism to function really it is necessary that a bigger part of the population has access to vaccination. The vaccination rate has to be near to 95% out of the population for combating measles and 85% for diphtheria and between 92% and 94% for whooping cough.

Other consequences of poverty have a direct impact on health. Doctors of the World call them "multiple factors of social vulnerability" or "social determinants of health". Let's have a look at some of them:

- 64% out of the persons met by Doctors of the World for this report were living in precarious or temporary housing conditions, many of them had no housing at all
- When they have a home, it is often insalubrious (mould and lead loaded with the disorders linked to it). They are nearly 30% declaring that they live in housings that are dangerous for their own health and for their children's health.
- Poor access to the toilet and to water

Very often children are also lacking sufficient and well balanced food.

Before ending my contribution today I want to tell the terrible consequence of poverty experienced by a young mother concerning the recognition of her child's identity.

Because she couldn't pay for her childbirth, the hospital refused to sign the child's birth certificate. Of course, this is illegal, but it happened...

The conclusion is that it is absolutely necessary to provide for overall public health systems based on solidarity, equality and fairness, open to all those who live in Europe.

### **Urgent request to the Council of Europe:**

Children's right to healthcare is one of the most fundamental, overall and essential rights. It is written in the European Social Charter and in a number of other texts. The INGO Doctors of the World calls on the Council of Europe to develop the necessary measures for implementing effectively this right in all States.

### **Increasing malnutrition in Europe: a contribution by AIC from Spain**

#### **Maritchu Rall**

Spain is the second European country having the highest poverty rate. The unemployment rate is presently around 27% and job seekers have no right to whatever help or benefits and no access to health protection systems.

In its report Eurostat says that over 2 million children are in families living under the poverty threshold and, because of this, exposed to malnutrition. And this happens also in industrialised countries.

In Spain over 3 million people are living with less than 307 Euros a month. Is it possible, in such conditions, to provide for good food? A school director mentions the increasing number of children who are no more given fish nor meat. Caritas calls this situation "severe poverty", especially when the child's only meal is the one provided by the school. And even there, restrictions are to be observed.

The Spanish federation of parents' organisations has sent a letter to the UN special rapporteur for children's rights denouncing the increase of malnutrition which is to be observed with the high obesity rate in children. This letter explains the present situation where Spain does no more meet its obligations to protect the right to food. In one region, where "hard austerity measures" have been decided, financial resources allocated to school meals have been suppressed so that municipalities are coping with their own means and with the help of NGOs for maintaining children's daily meals.

Andalucía is the most densely populated region of Spain; it is also the biggest agricultural region but salaries are very low and the unemployment rate is presently around 37%. Some children are living in extreme poverty (6%). The government of this

autonomous region has adopted an action plan for combating poverty and social exclusion. In this action plan financial resources are foreseen for school meals that should be distributed free of charge. It provides also for school meals to be distributed during holyday periods.

**A good practice:** In Catalonia, ICA is running the project “Para ti”. It is a private project aimed at providing food to school children. The system works with grants ensuring one meal a day. During the school year 2014-2015 over 100 grants have been allocated. The project includes also many ways for fundraising, among which the organisation of a lottery for Christmas.

## **Discussion**

These three communications were followed by a lively discussion. Exchanges focused on a **statement**, a **proposal** and a **warning** .

STATEMENT : the economic crisis has brought about a clear downturn in the implementation of rights especially in the rights of the child. In Europe, we moved at least 14 years back in this matter.

PROPOSAL : joint action is necessary, aimed at making that the State’s programmes really meet the level of children’s needs.

WARNING : we should stop speaking of persons “residing” in Europe and speak instead of persons “living” in Europe . Residing is a restrictive legal concept that has to do with being lawfully in a European territory, with a stable home and being able to document one’s income. Presently many migrant persons come to Europe; the fact is that they are here, live here and their fundamental human rights should be guaranteed just because of their inherent human dignity.

## **Panel 2 The impact of poverty on children's access to school and culture**

### **School success for all. International Movement Fourth World (ATD)**

#### **Dominique Destouches**

After having shortly mentioned the aim of the Movement, Mme Destouches showed the present impact of poverty on school achievements and access to culture for children and in particular the increase of school dropouts. She stressed also that access to basic knowledge is paramount for eradicating poverty and combating exclusion.

This is the reason why ATD has created in France a network aimed at acting as a think-tank gathering teachers with educational projects and parents committed to combat school exclusion. The purpose is to make that each child reaches the basic skills allowing to choose further training. This network undertakes, together with policymakers, to promote school achievements for all; it already participated in the drafting of the government circular of 15<sup>th</sup> October 2013 on "The school-parents relationship: strengthening the cooperation between parents and school in the territories". This document asserts that parent's participation - even of those who are the most vulnerable and at a distance from school-, is crucial for the child's achievements.

Some ATD pilot projects:

- The project called "When parents join in, all children will be successful".

This project has been developed in 21 districts in France. The purpose is to create by all possible means, a dialogue between parents and teachers. The result was that parents began to speak freely with each other and to help each other. They said that they would like to see the teachers more often, not only when there is a problem with their child, as it is usual in France. Professionals involved said that, through this dialogue, they got a better insight of the consequences of economic precariousness on the families' daily life, and on children. These exchanges also improved children's school life.

- The project "Acting together for the success of every child".

This project has been undertaken in a district of Lille. It aims at rebuilding links between parents and school, including for those parents who are very far away from school. This project has made everybody proud of the children's achievements,

including the many stakeholders in the district and also families. It brought about a change in the image of the difficulties experienced by the families and their children.

-The research and action project in a district of Strasbourg.

This project is built on a basic principle which is that parents are recognised to be the first educators of their child. It also takes into account the many different cultures meeting in this school because there are many children with migrant background in this district. Different actions have been undertaken and the result is that teachers changed their image of families and that families changed their image of school.

**One special action: a good practice** (within the framework of this project):

“Have a coffee before entering”.

The aim of this action is to forward networking between all organisations in the district; in the school hall, there is a big information panel showing all existing activities for children in the district, together with French language courses for adults and everything that could facilitate dialogue.

ATD also participated in the work of the French Economic and Social Council (a government counseling body) which has given an Advice called “A School promoting success for all children” where it is said that success is possible under certain conditions. But we see nevertheless that some children are still directed towards special schools whereas their disability is just to be poor. Such situation is unbearable.

The same Advice gives a series of good principles for accepting children from migrant origin in ground schools. It is to be found (in French) under [www.lecese.fr](http://www.lecese.fr)

### **Some remarks on the debate that followed**

**Anna Rurka** stresses how important such actions and researches are because they show the way for creating a dialogue between parents and teachers. But this will never hide the fact that this relationship between families, professionals, and institutions of the Republic is in reality a relationship between dominating and the dominated people. And again, within these two categories there are persons who have time and those who don't have time for meeting and exchanging about a child. Because of these facts this socio-cultural construction trying to promote a dialogue we have heard of, will vary from one country to another and according to the stakeholders' proximity making that teachers will understand what happens in a family living in poverty.

**Dominique Destouches** underlines during the discussion the role and usefulness of the campaigns made by ATD in all countries against labelling very poor persons. Prejudice and labels still exist; it would be a mistake to forget them. But it is possible to dismantle them.

We have to note however, that strategies for combating poverty are not a priority for the States. **Poverty is the poor child in politics.**

### **Panel 3 The life of children and young people**

#### **Short presentation of a video on the work achieved by animal mediation**

**FITRAM Patricia Arnoux, Evelyne Maréchal** : animal mediation in the relationship of children living in poverty with public settings like schools.

#### **Some key points of animal mediation**

- There is another poverty which is not about material deprivation; it is social and emotional poverty
- One of the means for getting out of this poverty and rebuilding one's self is the relationship between child and animal

FITRAM is a group of organisations building on the benefit of such mediation as the association Evi-dence (animal mediation in prisons) and the association Lianes creating links via the animal and combating social exclusion.

The main issue when working with children is how is to enter into the child's privacy without being intrusive? The animal does it:

- It creates a link of confidence
- It facilitates contacts and relationships
- It doesn't judge
- It may promote a sense of responsibility
- 

The video showed this very special relationship between children and horses.

### **Building up together, parents, social workers, children.....**

#### **Civil Society and Child poverty in Europe**

Instituto de Apoio a Crianca, IAC, Portugal **Paula Paço,**

I am here representing the Child Support Institute (IAC Instituto de Apoio à Criança), a Portuguese NGO that for 33 years has been promoting and defending children's rights ; it is often considered to be the ombudsman for children and is now a reference on child advocacy in our country. It is both a forum of discussion and reflection and an

active social inventor raising awareness for effective direct measures to be promoted for children and youth.

As guiding principles of our work methodology, I would like to emphasize integrity, respect, partnership, capacity building and empowerment of the persons with whom we are working on a daily basis.

The Street Children Project reflects clearly these principles. When, in October 1989, social workers went to the street to meet and stay with street children, they realised quickly that the success of their action aimed at social inclusion for these highly vulnerable children would, in fact, depend mostly on these children's level of motivation and participation in the change of their own life project.

We began by establishing a personalized relationship with the child, based on trust, understanding and affection. Our first task was to make them aware of the importance of changing their behaviour. As social workers, we had to help them discovering their capacities to become the actors of their own change process, empowering them to participate and perform an active role in their group and in the society.

It was not always easy. Most of them had difficulties in accepting the idea that they had some skills which, sometimes, just needed to be improved. This is why the educators of the Street Children Project focused their efforts on promoting each child's individual and social skills enabling them to rebuild their self-image, improve their self-esteem and find back to the dignity they had lost. The situations of poverty, abandonment or the different types of violence to which they were submitted could not leave us indifferent.

The process of training citizenship privileges a change in values, attitudes and beliefs and promotes tolerance, peace and respect of human beings; this has to be developed inside the family, at school, in social settings and organisations. So, when in 2013, ESAN challenged us (once again) to participate in the Notebook "From Words to Actions" we could not, and would never, say no.

Listening to people and being the voice of those who have difficulties to be heard, are part of our mission. We did at once understand that this kind of action could also serve as a valuable tool for promoting the right to participation and as a valid contribution to the effective definition of inclusive policies.

This exercise was considered to be a "conducting wire" for reflecting on each person's rights and duties. It strengthened also our belief that the struggle against poverty and exclusion cannot be successful without this knowledge of the rights and duties of each and every citizen.

We got the participation of persons of different ages and from all over the country. The testimonies were very strong and showed the devastating effects of experiencing social

exclusion for whatever reasons. We think that these notebooks will act as a wake-up-call for the preservation of human dignity, which is the fundamental value of Europe, this place where human rights are respected.

We have to fight every day for these rights and the participation of the civil society is crucial.

The involvement of persons in decisions concerning their own life is essential and promotes a better civic participation of all citizens. This should be a concern for everyone, politicians, NGOs, and actors in social work. Only in this way will we manage to contribute to strengthening citizenship and build up together a better and happier world for all.

**A good practice:** at the beginning I worked with 3 street children; they made that I could see their families, that were excluded from the society, had poor self-esteem; in fact, they were the authors of their exclusion because they had the feeling to be unskilled and of no use. We tried to strengthen their skills, to make them becoming self-confident so that they could undertake their own process of change.

During the discussion **Paula Paço** gave an additional information:

In a letter sent to the Portuguese Parliament children and youth from all countries gathered in a congress in 2010 made several recommendations. The three most important ones are for the States:

- To encourage the education of children living in poverty because education is a guarantee for a better future
- To promote information and awareness raising on the consequences of poverty
- To extend the work with the families for developing their skills because it is important for these persons to feel that they are useful.

## **Far beyond short solutions**

### **Contribution by a social worker of the Children's Home in Strasbourg**

#### **Ryszard Michalak**

I borrow the title of this contribution from Georges Bataille who said that some solutions are bright and other flat and short.

For the issue that we are tackling today we have to be slow and tenacious.

We are far away from the times when there were big institutions caring for orphans and foster families for children living in poverty. Presently we have to react in emergency situations. Once the case has been reported and followed by the decision of placing the child (decision made by a judge or by a local authority), it is up to a public service, like the local Children's Home, to offer a shelter and care for the child. As a social worker in this Home I have to welcome this child who is often very anxious, irritable and doesn't feel safe in the new surroundings. We have then to take into account the beginning and the duration of this child's difficult and precarious life conditions: the more children experienced these difficulties when they were very young, the more they will remain vulnerable, the more their cognitive functioning and their learning skills will be affected.

As indicated by the two teachers having marked my professional path, Janusz Korczak and August Aichhorn, we have to start from observations on the ground and build up new systems with good professional practices.

The main issue in this home, some years ago, was about providing an alternative project for youth for whom there was a great risk that they would never, for different reasons, be adapted to the group of emergency arrivals. The purpose was to stop focusing on living in a group and to bring an individual and adapted answer to the difficult situation of the young boy or girl and his/her family. In most cases these families live in great poverty and sometimes are homeless, unemployed and suffering lack of proper food.

The home then created a so-called "outdoors service", as opposed to the living in a group within the « Home ». The teenagers, 16 and more years old, were living in individual rooms rented for them in the city; the purpose was also to provide support according to their difficulties and needs and so a new methodology for this service was developed. It was above all about including the skills of the family by working with the parents in their home and trying to give individual support. This includes taking into account the specificity of each family and each youth.

I just want to tell you here the long work done with a young girl, let's call her Julie. She was totally lost, lacking structure despite the fact that she had been cared for in different settings from childhood on. She had absolutely no idea of existing rules and laws and didn't know what is forbidden or allowed. She was just living according to her impulse and important sexual wishes. She was quickly on the way to prostitution.

Her brain was really chaotic, like a volcano, with eruptions of kindness and eruptions of violence. In her daily life she often said yes with her brain but no with her heart. When she was snowed under with her past or with violence she became overcome with anguish.

I began to work with her when she was 15 and had an abortion. I tried to help her together with her mother. It was the beginning of a long support with many different

steps. It is only two years later on that she could partially have access to another way of being on earth and only within her close family.

She was the one who showed me how to help her and where she was so deeply wounded. Her erratic way of life was caused by her feeling of having no roots, of having been abandoned by her mother. She often put herself in danger and this was like a call for judicial intervention; she did not want to be punished, but she wanted that somebody could mend her meaningless life story. It needed a long period of time for her to find back to a human link with others. Now she is a young woman, with her own family; she is the mother of three children.

I would like to end my contribution by saying that I hope that this methodology of support, with a mix of education and social work, could become the basis for a large exchange with this Home that has become a creative and innovative actor by proposing a steady evolution of support not only in Strasbourg, but also elsewhere in Europe.

**A good practice:** creation, within a setting like the Home for children in difficulties, of an “outdoors service” adapted to the most destabilized youth and close to each individual’s life. This creation has been possible thanks to committed judges who have allowed this exceptional system of social work to exist.

## **Realising children’s rights through empowering parents and families.** **Eurochild Luca Merotta**

Some few words on Eurochild. It is a network of 170 different associations across 33 countries that work with and for children. It advocates for children’s rights and wellbeing to be at the heart of policy making.

Material deprivation is a real challenge in today’s societies. We observe that there are massive gaps between the aspirations of UN, Council of Europe and EU and what actually happens on the ground.

Levels of child poverty are escalating. Despite high level EU recognition of the need to prioritise investment in children, throughout Europe we see governments adopting austerity measures that contradict what we know needs to happen to tackle child poverty and promote social inclusion. There is a growing fragmentation in our societies, further marginalization of families where parents struggle to find or stay in work, and disinvestment in early years and family support even though we know prevention and early intervention policies make good economic sense in the long-term.

The size of the challenge demands that all of us working towards the realisation of children’s rights draw strength from each other’s work. This is not about doing

everything together or always sharing the same views. It is about keeping an eye on the bigger goal and building on each other's strength to work towards them.

The question we are trying to answer is not the « what » - we know that it can never be a solution to separate children from their biological parents, without first supporting the family and ensuring all families are able to live dignified lives and take responsibility for caring for their children – but the « how ». How to support families in need? How to maximise the scarce resources and provide best possible care to all those who need it? How to make sure that the children do not fall through the cracks in the system and end up at great risk of exploitation, abuse or neglect?

We believe that international bodies are crucial in this struggle. Whilst the EU has no legal competence in the matter it is important for its vision and direction. In February 2013, the European Commission adopted the Recommendation on Investing in Children - policy guidance which although it does not have any legal weight is supposed to influence Member State policy reform in particular by linking it to the use of EU structural funds. This Recommendation is based on three pillars:

- Access to adequate resources and reconciling work and family life
- Access to quality services ( early education and care, education, health, housing and family support)
- Children's participation in decision that affect them, and in cultural, leisure and sport activities.

Importantly, the Investing in Children Recommendation explicitly refers to enhancing family support and the quality of alternative care settings.

However important it is to get EU-level leadership and policy guidance, it will only make a difference to the lives of children if there is a clear follow-up within Member States. Our work has therefore focused much more on strengthening the capacity of national members to put pressure on governments. There are also Council of Europe Conventions and Recommendations – which although signed by national governments are insufficiently applied in national policy.

The strength of Eurochild's advocacy work lies in its access to high quality information from members about what is happening on the ground, what the issues are and what is producing results. Part of our core business has also been to share practice and develop policy expertise.

We have presently 3 areas of focus: family and parenting support, early years education and care, children in alternative care.

Eurochild sees family and parenting support as central to the pursuit of realising children's rights and promoting well-being across Europe. In October 2012, we published a compendium of inspiring practices of early intervention and prevention in family and parenting support from all across Europe, which offers a small sample of services that show what works in Europe to improve outcomes for children and that demonstrate the huge potential of developing new, inventive and cost effective ways of strengthening and empowering children and families.

In March 2014, an Alliance of 24 European networks committed to end child poverty and to promote child well-being across Europe, coordinated by Eurochild, published an implementation Handbook for the Investing in Children Recommendation. The ambition is that this acts as inspiration for policy makers and advocates alike.

If Europe invests in children in a way that supports parents and families, ensures access to quality affordable services, and empowers children and young people to participate in decision-making we will build the foundations for a better future.

## **Panel 4 Support for children**

### **How to give a voice to children living in poor families when they are facing courts?**

#### **Association Thémis, Josiane Bigot, Judge for children**

The association Thémis does exist since 25 years, just like the Convention on the rights of the child. As a president of this association and as a judge I have been confronted with child poverty and presently we all see how much this poverty is increasing. In a society with economic difficulties children and women are the first victims.

How is children's voice heard in judicial proceedings? And how, when children are living in poverty? Laws do not differentiate children, rich or poor. The article 12 of the Convention on the rights of the child provides for the right of each child asking for it, to be heard and this right is submitted to two conditions: the child has to be "capable of forming his or her own views " and proceedings have to be "in a matter affecting the child".

At first glance it seems easy to determine whether these conditions are met, but in reality it is extremely difficult. Let's take an example: in proceedings on the eviction of a family, one could consider that the matter is affecting also the child; but will this child be heard? And, if so, is there not a risk for the child to be manipulated? As to the age of

discernment, the rule is applied differently according to the countries; it may be 8 years for some countries, 12 years for others. A friend of mine, a psychologist, considered that it is all about the judge's own capacity of discernment. Will the judge be able to discern whether the child has to be heard or not? I was always very much in favour of hearing the child but, with time and experience, I became more restrictive because the child's voice may be misused by the adults.

There is one area where poverty will not affect the views of the judge or the views of the child; it is in matters of parental authority. All children heard by the judge when it comes to decide whether the child will live with his father or his mother and how the right to visits will be organised, all these children are in the same situation, whatever their living conditions may be; of course, there could be a difference in the words used, but all children have the same approach.

This is different in other cases, especially when children are victims of violence or ill-treatment. We are faced with sexual violence at all levels of the society, but when it comes to physical violence, children living in vulnerable and poor families are more often exposed to be beaten; it may be because some cultures have tough educational methods or because there is more violence in families living in great poverty. These children need a very special care. Indeed, in the so-called "poor families" there is sometimes less attention brought to children and neighbours or friends don't consider that it is necessary to report the facts. These children have really to be protected. In France they have a right to social protection services. According to latest laws the child is at the center of the protection system, as the educator from the Children's Home just told us.

But it is a revolting fact, -I want to underline it here-, that children are still directed to public settings on grounds of ill-treatments by the family whereas it is just that this family is facing serious economic difficulties. This should no more happen and presently child judges are very unwilling to pronounce such placements. But, what to do when children are in the street? When they have no shelter? When there is nothing to eat? This situation is for me a terrible failure because these kinds of Homes should be reserved for children whose parents are defaulting, they are not guilty, they are defaulting and it would be possible to help them to take again responsibility for caring for their child. It will be particularly complicated to ensure the rights of children who are placed in such Homes as their families will have difficulties for visiting them; this will make it difficult to maintain or re-establish the link with the family. We have to consider also that these families have often many children and brothers and sisters should not be separated.

**A good practice:** for all these children needing protection the association Thémis is often acting as an ad hoc legal guardian; this means that we are caring for the interests

of the child when their parents are not in a position to do so, and the more when they ill-treated the child.

I would like to mention here two kinds of situations where children's voice should specially be heard in legal proceedings:

- First situation: foreign unaccompanied children; they are plenty in France; they badly need a system for the recognition of their rights. Themis is working on it. The State provided for such a system. The problem is that there is a suspicion hanging on them that they pretend to be minors whereas they are it no more and the other problem is that they have to bring evidence that they are isolated. On these two points their voice should be heard.
- Second situation: children who have difficulties with law, juvenile offenders about whom there would be a lot to say and who are mostly having disadvantaged backgrounds.

During the discussion Mme Bigot brought additional information on age of discernment: it is not fixed by law, but usually around 10 years. In France age of discernment is also the age of penal responsibility and of guilt.

Another question was: What can we do for ending poverty impact from generation to generation?

Mme Bigot answers that the only way is to help parents to become again active, take their responsibilities without ever making them feel guilty.

"It is in the most disadvantaged families that, as a judge, I discovered the real human values", she added.

## **Changes in the training of social workers for tackling the issue of poverty and exclusion**

### **High school of social work in Strasbourg (ESTES) Josef Guillaume**

Some recurring features in social work training:

- Social workers have to work with other professionals and non-professionals as it is very important to broaden the approach to teachers, sport trainers or any other adult so as to make that the child meets with persons who don't look at him or her only as a child living in poverty.

- Social work is divided into different professions which is a strength and a guarantee to keep looking at the child sometimes just as a child, or as a student, or others. This diversity is richness.
- Social workers, according to their profession, are working in settings that are also much deferring. Some do exist since a long time, have their history and a recognised know-how, others are very new and have been created on the request of local or national authorities. This diversity is also very useful.

There is a present trend to format good practices and to group different settings which will be to the detriment of diversity and this worries us.

### **What does it mean to train professionals for working with children who live in poverty?**

- Undertaking such training always happens after previous good experiences in different areas.
- Some students are themselves poor and our registration and school fees are more and more important which causes them great difficulties.
- The training programme is built for one half on theoretical courses and for the other half on practical training in settings where they will be given the opportunity to develop their own experience.
- The conceptual and practical approach will provide them with some distance as to poverty so that they gain a better understanding of what children are experiencing.
- Within the training there is also individual follow-up for helping students in the choice of the setting or organisation where they will work.
- Working with a stakeholder approach is something new that has to be learned.

Testimony of a social worker:

**How does the training prepare us to encounter poverty?** It is mainly through experience based on the student's commitments before training.

My present experience is with wandering about isolated migrant youth.

During our training we have had many debates, especially on child poverty. But it is impossible to develop "instructions" on how to behave and how to make contact with the child. It is mainly about having a holistic approach of the child; the support will be to give him/her a framework for self-structuring. It is impossible to give a recipe.

**A good practice in social workers' training:** to combine theoretical training, learning skills and professional commitment.

## **These holidays opening the way to future**

### **Secours populaire français member of the European Social Action Network ( ESAN) René Ledermann**

ESAN was created by the French organisation called Secours Populaire Français with the aim to develop solidarity actions all over Europe and in all domains: education, health, disability, and fight against all forms of discriminations, human rights and children's rights with a special focus on the right to holidays.

Holidays with the Secours Populaire Français

Some words on history : in November 1945, just at the end of the war, the Secours Populaire Français was in its first days, even not yet officially registered , but it already organised a holiday camp in the center of France ( Mont d'Or) for boys and girls from families victims of fascism. At that time the aim was, of course, to bring some comfort to these children but also to build up, with them, a better world. Children were and remain the main focus of our organisation with its Holiday campaigns for children who are victims of all kinds of exclusions.

#### **Holidays is something that helps growing up**

I can tell it out of my own experience. I was living with my parents in a very small flat with, as only playground, the next door waste ground. Then arrived holiday camps and I discovered other landscapes, other friends, and adults who took care of us, of me. These camps forged my life and it was the same for thousands of children who went on holidays with the Secours Populaire.

In the years 60-70, enterprises and youth organisations opted for the system of holiday camps. The enterprises were then asked to give free of charge some places in their camps for children of the Secours Populaire. So these children went on holidays with other children whose parents were working at all levels of the enterprise. They were like in another world and - what is more important- they were together in the same world.

Then another question was raised: why not promote holidays for the whole family? A system of Holiday-checks was set up so that excluded families could stay in a holiday center of their choice. The first steps of this new experience were difficult. The families seemed to be enthusiastic at this idea, but they were not ready to pack and go for staying with families who knew the rules on how to dress, how to choose among the leisure-time proposals, and other things. I have to say that the Secours Populaire did not

measure, at that time, the crucial importance of supporting people so that very disadvantaged families could accept these holidays despite their great difficulties. Nowadays holidays have become usual and thousands of families are going on holidays with their children.

### **The holiday villages « Fellow of the world»**

On the basis of the experience it had gathered, the Secours Populaire created the movement “Fellow of the world” aimed at developing solidarity among children from here and there in the world. Such clubs were created in many countries. In addition to solidarity, the aim was to highlight the Rights as listed in the International Convention of the Rights of the Child: the right to education, the right to good food, the right to safety and health, the right to culture and the right to holidays. These were also activities of the clubs “Fellow of the world”.

The holiday villages “Fellow of the world” gather together children from different countries for an experience of solidarity, of opening to one another and exchanging, as “fellows”. It is a chance for making an extraordinary experience: making that children from France meet children from countries where the Secours Populaire is also working, living together moments of rich discoveries, new experiences, and cultural exchanges so as to create bonds of sustainable friendship. Imagine the impact when children from Israel and Palestine, from Nepal and Greece, from Benin and France are discovering each other.

This year 20 villages “Fellow of the world” opened their doors, among which 4 outside of France in Madagascar, Morocco, Lebanon and Greece...Who will tell the growth of the seed of solidarity in each child’s future? Who knows how far the wind will blow and bring peace among people?

### **The days for those who are “forgotten for holidays”**

The first days were organised in 1975: despite all efforts for organizing holidays for all children, the Secours Populaire realised on 15<sup>th</sup> of August that very many still had not been enjoying sunshine. This brought about the idea to organise one day for discovering the sea so that these children had also something to tell for the first traditional schoolwork on “ nice holidays” From year to year this day became two and three days; this year it was three weeks.

In 2015, for the celebration of its 70 years, the Secours Populaire has organised, with UNESCO as a sponsor, a big event with children from all over the world in Paris ( Champ de Mars) , on 19<sup>th</sup> August. It was a pleasure to see how everybody, children and adults enjoyed this meeting with 70 000 children.

Are European organisations necessary for creating better living conditions? Probably they are.

What is sure is that all these children will remember their holidays opening the way for a better future.

### **A good practice: working on one's mistakes**

The report says that the Secours Populaire "did not measure at that time, the crucial importance of supporting people so that very disadvantaged families could accept these holidays despite their great difficulties". By working hard on this lack, and over time, it was finally achieved that "nowadays holidays have become usual and thousands of families are going on holidays with their children."

## **Conclusions**

### **Looking back at this day Caritas**

#### **Peter Verhaegen**

You have seen our exhibition at the Palais and you guess that our methodology was to listen to children's voice. We tried and translated this into political recommendations. The EU Commission has included our contributions into its Recommendation "Investing in children" which has already been mentioned today. I will make no further comments on it.

I would rather begin my speech by saying " dear fathers, dear mothers, dear grand' fathers, dear grand' mothers, uncles, aunts, or future fathers and future mothers, **lets listen to children.**

The Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe said this morning that the European Social Charter is the key instrument for the Council of Europe relationship with its member States. I was very pleased to hear this. She also underlined that the complex challenge of families' and childrens' poverty will need to be tackled with a multidimensional approach including prevention, support to families and access to services with a special focus on the most disadvantaged ones. Families and children should be involved in the decisions concerning them; this has been repeated several times today and is also one of the recommendations of Caritas. It is at the core of our work at local, national and international level.

The many binding instruments of the Council of Europe and the Strategy on the rights of the child that will soon be adopted have also been mentioned. We could add some

more instruments on this list as the UN Convention on children's rights or the Initiative of social protection of the International Labour Organisation.

NGOs have told about their involvement in very many projects for combating poverty. They are priceless, of course, but their very existence shows that those international instruments and others are not applied.

Now, do we really need more international conventions? For me, I feel sure that we have presently the legal and political instruments we need for eradicating poverty and still there are thousands of organisations running thousands of projects - and they are very active, very committed and very creative in fund raising for these projects, they have to be. Such projects are the tool for combating the worst forms of child poverty.

The fact is that these existing legal instruments are not implemented and this is a political issue; it is a matter of political will to link reality at grass roots level to national policies; because this link is missing, or is not strong enough, because it is not given enough emphasis, child poverty is still not eradicated.

We, as members of the Conference of the INGOs of the Council of Europe have the very important task to inform politicians and to bring about a greater political will for respecting the inherent dignity of all human beings, including children.

### **A Warning:**

**Politicians should consider very seriously the cost of non –investment in children, the cost for the society.**

Children are growing up today. They don't have time to wait for the crisis to be over, for good conditions for action; they have the right to live in their families and families really deserve the society's support for raising their children. In Africa, there is a say:

"It needs a whole village for bringing up a child". We have lost this wisdom in Europe.

### **Concluding the day**

#### **Anna Rurka**

The programme of this day and the different contributions that have been brought are a basis for analyzing our future work and show the questions that we should rise next year for looking carefully at the situation of children in other European countries

Today, the following items were mentioned

- Health, with necessary early prevention, even before birth
- Poverty, more and more bearing on children and women
- Factors with cumulative effect creating difficult situation. When referring about children in danger (children needing protection) this cumulative effect should be underlined so that families are not labeled with neglect which is giving a wrong narrow picture of a lack of protection operated at different levels. ( emotional, physical, economic and others)
- The birth of children given no identity, or their belated registration
- Street children seeking shelter
- Migration considered as a crime: isolated minors are still in administrative detention centres instead of being given a shelter elsewhere, according to the Court
- The regional dimension of poverty and the difference in the way of tackling this issue from one area to the other
- The INGOs' task to remind the States that, with the crisis, we went 14 years back – some say 20 years – in the respect of fundamental rights
- Residence, which is not the good word for designating persons who are here and live here and contribute to the economy as consumers
- Different ways for supporting the family : Mediation methods between child and family (animal mediation, holydays, notebooks)
- Necessary general awareness raising: are there public media campaigns on child poverty?
- Lack of access to rights: lack of information is a key factor of non-access to their rights by children themselves
- Children in judicial proceedings : we have to advocate for the child to be heard in matters affecting him/her and to promote problem solving by the families themselves with the help of support, including the support of NGOs

These are the items for analysis that are at our disposal for getting forward in our work.

A remark as to social work: social work is carried out in the crack between professional social work and charities' work. Charities need social workers and social workers need volunteers. We have to promote this cooperation

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