

## **Poverty      Proposals made by the Conference of INGOs**

### **Objectives**

The INGOs of the Council of Europe have already contributed to the work on poverty in Europe in a document finalized in 2007<sup>1</sup>. Because of the important challenge resulting from the present economic crisis and the unavoidable changes that will follow it, the Conference decides to go on with this work and to propose here a number of measures.

It is indeed the responsibility of the INGOs to be engaged in two ways; on the one hand, they are engaged at national level in the close support of people living in a general lack of security, poverty, or great poverty and, on the other hand, they have to bring their contribution to the drafting of long term policies with actions that only the States are in a position to undertake.

### **Consequently :**

**The Conference of the INGOs of the Council of Europe, considering the multiplication of situations of poverty in Europe , recommends that the Committee of Ministers considers**

- **to meet the request of the Conference of the INGOs to include the Article 30 of the European Social Charter (revised) into the ' hard core' of this Charter and to insist on the States for accepting this provision of the Charter if they have not yet done it;**
- **to adopt an Action Plan to serve as practical guidelines for the member States and as a programme for combating poverty (2011-2021) based, among others, on the below mentioned measures and provided with a monitoring system of it's implementation.**

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<sup>1</sup> « La contribution des ONG à la lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale en Europe » Jean-Pierre Gollé, le Regroupement sur la grande Pauvreté et Cohésion Sociale et ATD Quart Monde

## **Summary of the position paper**

### **I. A change in paradigm.**

I.1 The paradigm change in Europe and in the world: from granted help to solidarity between people with equal dignity based on human rights.

I.2. A definition of poverty

I.3 Precisions in vocabulary: general lack of security, relative poverty, great poverty, extreme poverty.

Our aim is to firmly combat what produces at economic, cultural and social level the different situations of poverty.

**The Conference of the INGOs of the Council of Europe aims to contribute to the drafting of such policies and investment programmes at short, medium and long term that the States have to undertake right now for overcoming poverty in Europe.**

### **II. Presently proposed actions**

II.1. Actions to be undertaken for housing: investments to be made by each State in its properties

II.2. Actions to be undertaken concerning children and families

a. Actions to be undertaken by the States in education

b. Actions to be undertaken by the States in school health services

c. Actions to be undertaken for promoting the right of each child to live with his/her family.

II.3. Actions to be undertaken concerning the population in working age.

a. Actions aimed at and life long vocational training

b. Actions aimed at combating lack of job security

c. Actions aimed at securing social protection to all

d. Actions aimed at health at work.

II.4. Specific actions to be undertaken for old aged people and people with dependency needs

Actions in the short term for improving their purchasing power.

II.5. Necessary measures for special training given to social and administrative staff

II.6. Information and communication on the rights of people living in Europe.

All these requested investments will of course have an immediate return on the fight against poverty. But they are above all an efficient means for fighting against the persistence of poverty, against the fact that the children of the poor, in the present economic context and if nothing is done, will become poor and excluded adults.

## **POSITION PAPER**

### **I. A change in paradigm, definition of poverty and vocabulary.**

#### **I.1 Paradigm change in Europe and in the world.**

Considering the individual as a bearer of rights is a major change in paradigm to which the Council of Europe has brought an important contribution. It allows for moving away from granting help towards solidarity between people having equal dignity. This implies that the individual's experience, needs and projects be respected.

The European Union is opportunely making a call for a work on poverty in 2010 and this right now, where the Lisbon Strategy has to be revised for the coming years. This is indeed the more necessary because of the still unpredictable consequences of the present economic crisis that is specially affecting the most vulnerable groups of population.

In addition, the progressive globalisation of economy in the last century has raised awareness on a parallel globalisation of poverty. This is why the United Nations, on the request of NGOs, have developed an approach of poverty that, while bearing in mind the economic feature of poverty, highlighted its consequences on each human being and on the society where these people are living.

All the States are recognizing, as it is written in the draft of Guiding Principles proposed within the framework of the United Nations that "human rights violations are to be identified as a root cause of extreme poverty and an obstacle to its eradication"<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, a system of society has been developed under the domination of economy where there is no place for the human being. This means that underlying the importance of civil, economic, social and cultural human rights is both a challenge and a commitment.

It is not necessary to repeat that equal access to human rights is recognised in all international legislations. It is also obvious that the implementation of such principles will be different according to the different cultures.

Within the member States of the Council of Europe it is well admitted that each and every person should have an access to the whole set of rights that have been recognised for the population as a whole. This means that they should enjoy equal treatment, with those measures of equalization as necessary, in their living conditions, for having access to all rights as a human being especially the right to protection of one's life, dignity and freedom. This implies that policies and measures should be drafted with the direct stakeholders, that is to say with people living in poverty and those who are working with them.

#### **I.2. A definition of poverty**

The definition that is to be found in the report made by Wrésinski<sup>3</sup>, which has been used afterwards in many international bodies does settle this paradigm change. It reads <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ATD Fourth World « Moving towards Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

*“Poverty is the missing of one or several securities, especially job security, making that individuals and families are in a position to answer their professional, family and social obligations and to enjoy their fundamental rights. The lack of security can be more or less important and have more or less damaging and long lasting consequences. It is ending in great poverty when it affects several life domains, becomes persistent, jeopardizes the chances to again take on one’s responsibilities and to win back by oneself one’s rights, in a near future”.*

22 years later on, we read the following statement in the papers of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations <sup>5</sup>

*Persons living in extreme poverty are entitled to fully enjoy all human rights, including the right to participate in the adoption of decisions which concern them, and to contribute to the well-being of their families, their communities and human kind.*

Restoring the individual in his/her right to participate thus becomes the aim of any social policy, whatever the limitations in ability experienced at short or long term by this individual might be. It is then the duty of the society and especially of the States to remove the barriers that are reducing the individual’s abilities to contribute to his/her well-being as well as to the well-being of those people with whom he/she is living.

This definition of poverty is challenging: how is it possible for a State, who is responsible for the well-being of those people living within its territory, to ensure the sustainable provision, and, when necessary the recovering, of all securities that are necessary in human life?

### **I.3 Precisions in vocabulary: general lack of security, relative poverty, great poverty, extreme poverty.**

It is necessary to precise the vocabulary because several wordings are used for referring to situations of poverty that are different in nature and nevertheless always situations difficult to bear for those who experience them.

General lack of security refers to this insecurity resulting from a lack of ressources, as no housing, poor education and so on.

Relative poverty refers to poverty experienced in a given context of society. This situation may be more or less damaging when people are comparing their way of living with other people’s living standard. The growing gap between incomes is a worsening factor of relative poverty leading towards a painful feeling of exclusion with sometimes important consequences on the individual’s life as well as on his/her community.

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<sup>3</sup> Rapport « Grande pauvreté et précarité économique et sociale » présenté au nom du Conseil Economique et social (France) par M. Joseph Wrésinski le 10 et 11 février 1987, JO 1987, n° 6, 28 février 1987. Voyez <http://www.atd-quartmonde.org/Grande-pauvrete-et-precarite.html>

<sup>4</sup> Our translation

<sup>5</sup> Sub-commissions for the promotion and the protection of human rights, in its resolution 2006/9 Implementation of standards and criteria for human rights in the context of the fight against extreme poverty

Great poverty refers to situations that cannot just be measured in terms of income level but are resulting from a whole set of difficulties experienced in different life domains and that are leading towards a progressive paralysis of people's capacity to cope.

Extreme poverty refers to that lack of feeling that one does exist in a human community; it leads towards the loss of one's identity and of the structure of one's personality that may be due to a series of diverse causes.

These precisions in vocabulary are highlighting the progressive social exclusion. The contrary of exclusions is not inclusion or integration, but dignity and a feeling of belonging. Living in the society means to be there, making roots there and being in a position to bring one's contribution.

Today, the steady growing number of people living in a lack of security, in poverty and extreme poverty requires our vigilance; this change in paradigm together with the recognition of each individual's rights and capacity to act and react should not be a reason for the States not to take the necessary measures nor for a dilution their responsibilities.

These responsibilities are rooted in the two big European Treaties which the States have a duty to comply with. These treaties are

- the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms  
Rome 4.11.1950
- The European Social Charter 1961.1996

To eradicate poverty means to combat directly and resolutely all economic, cultural and social provisions that are producing individual or collective situations of poverty.

Whatever the commitment of the society and the individual efforts may be for supporting people living in poverty, eradication of poverty will only be achieved if the States, who are the organizing power of the society and who have the duty to secure the well-being of all, decide to make investments, which means expenses having a positive return in the long term in the fight against poverty. These expenses have to be made on complete and sustainable measures.

**The Conference of the INGOs of the Council of Europe aims to contribute to the drafting of policies and investment programmes at short, medium and long term that the States have to undertake right now for overcoming poverty in Europe.**

## **II. Present proposed measures**

The analysis of the expertise gathered by the INGOs results in proposing the following measures on housing as well as specific measures for the three groups of population that are

- Children and families
- The population in working age
- Elderly people and people with dependency needs.

## **II. 1. Measures for housing**

For all the three groups of population, investing in its properties has become essential for each State. Having a decent place where to live (with water, electricity, heating), for a rental that is proportionate with the individual's income, is a pre-condition to any measure of inclusion. For children, it is a determining health factor, a condition for schooling and social life. For job seekers, it is absolutely necessary to have and address. For elderly people and people with dependency needs, having an accessible housing located in a friendly social network is a pre-condition for being cared for at home with respect and dignity.

Building and renting flats in areas that are well connected to transportation means and basic shops is a good investment policy with quick returns because it is creating jobs in building, and at medium and long term it will generate in the population of people living in poverty a feeling of dignity and of belonging and participation in social life.

Furthermore, flexibility and ability to adapt to job offers does also depend upon the possibility to find a good housing in a reasonable distance of the new working place. Modern States should think about good housing and transportation policies that would be compatible with the necessary geographical mobility resulting from the economic change.

The European housing policy as to social flats should be a policy of investing in good quality, with sustainable equipment built in by all different providers, including soundproofing and thermal insulation. Local authorities, in their competence as owners of these flats, should secure the quick realization of repairs that are normally falling to the owner.

It will also be necessary to consider the essential social support for access to housing.

## **II. 2. Specific Actions concerning children and families**

### **a. Actions to be undertaken by the States in education**

The expertise gained on the spot by many INGOs is showing that doing badly at school not only is a result of poverty but has to be considered as its main cause. Indeed, when the child, and later on the youngster, has not become able to master the basic academic skills (reading, writing, calculating) and did not learn how to communicate with other people, he/she will be in a situation of failing, of being put aside and progressively excluded, and this the more when further vocational training did not allow for filling in the gap.

Early intervention with support at school, even in kindergartens is an investment in the long term that the States should consider as the best means for fighting against professional and social exclusion of the child when becoming an adult.

This implies a sufficient number of staff in schooling and support as well as a special training of this staff on the impact of bad material, social or psychological conditions on the achievements at school of each child or young individual.

**b. Actions to be undertaken by the States in school health services**

The States should ensure the functioning of a dense network of school health services, especially in pre-schools and in the first school years so that each child is looked after at least once a year and directed towards centers for vaccination, dentists and other health care services when necessary. Each primary and secondary school should have a nurse among its permanent staff. This nurse should ensure, in coordination with the family, the follow up of the health and good development of each child.

**c. Actions to be undertaken for promoting the right of each child to live with his/her family.**

Living in poverty should never end up in separating the families. The support given to families should be geared towards their empowerment.

All these human investments for children in schooling, education and services at all levels, have to be designed in the long term and are in fact the best way to combat poverty.

**II. 3. Specific actions concerning the population in working age.**

**a. Actions to be undertaken by the States for initial and life long training.**

Under-qualification is a sentence to precarious jobs, to giving one's workforce for a low salary, or even to a non-declared job with no access to immediate or future social protection.

For these reasons the States have to undertake important investments in life long vocational training. The new shape of economy and its specific constraints are requesting a real commitment to a prospective thinking and to drawing the consequences in provisional management of qualifications and jobs. The States should be encouraged to participate in the drafting of a joint strategy together with research laboratories, professional organisations, the competent public services and concerned ONGs.

At the level of the enterprises and the management of unemployment, assessment of skills should be frequent and systematically end in additional training or new training without loss in salary. This is a means to combat the lack of job security and poverty linked with poorly qualified jobs or with outdated existing qualifications.

Employers, trade unions, training bodies, local authorities and NGOs are the best stakeholders in all specific measures for supporting those people who, for whatever reason, have no access to employment.

**b. Actions to be undertaken by the States for combating lack of job security**

It is the responsibility of the States to adopt legislation and other statutory measures aimed at facilitating the creation as well as the functioning of enterprises at administrative level as well as at the level of financial resources.

Integrative enterprises and adapted enterprises have to be supported in their creation and functioning because they are providing normal paid jobs together with the social protection in use in their country to any individual who cannot, not yet or no more find a job on the regular labour market.

#### **c. Actions to be undertaken by the States for social protection**

The States should ensure that the legislation as adopted in their country for social protection, especially for health care and retirement benefits will be strictly applied as soon as somebody is engaged in a paid job.

#### **d. Specific actions to be undertaken in labour health services**

The access to labour health care services for any worker, regardless to the duration of his/her labour relationship, is one of the conditions for fighting against poor health in the population. Health care for the working population should be easily accessible.

### **II.4. Specific actions to be undertaken for old aged people and people with dependency needs**

In the short term it will be necessary to provide for a real improvement in these people's purchasing power so that they will be able to buy by themselves the support and services they think to be in need for. Their right to dignity implies that they can choose the place where they want to live and make their own decisions on the support and services that will improve their daily life and prevent their feeling of being excluded.

The technical aids that are necessary for compensating their dependency should be available at an affordable price. Living with a low income should not exclude people from their access to goods that could improve their quality of life.

Social services, local authorities, user's organisations and families are the preference stakeholders in such immediate measures to be taken for improving the quality of life of elderly people and people with dependency needs.

Among such measures it should also be ensured that social protection, and especially access to retirement pension will remain accessible for family helpers who are of working age but who stop working full time or part time for a given period of time, for providing the necessary care to a member of their family with dependency needs. This is an important measure for preventing future poverty.

Investing in a sufficient number of accessible housing in medium and long term will be needed. In so doing the standards of universal design should be respected in all building programs.

### **II.5. Necessary measures for special training given to social and administrative staff.**

Special training sessions for staff members who will be in contact with people living in difficult situations is a precondition for a good implementation of measures aimed at fighting against poverty. This is

important for administrative officers, school staff, people working in bodies for the promotion of employment, health services and many others. This training should, among others, tackle the issue of the devastating effects of lack of security on people and of the time they will need for becoming again self-confident and confident in other people. Let us quote again the last part of the definition of poverty “ [ lack of security] *jeopardizes the chances to again take on one’s responsibilities and to win back by oneself one’s rights, in a near future*”. This statement is based on a long experience of the period of “rehabilitation” that is necessary for any person who, for diverse causes, has lived in a situation of lack of security in one or several life domains. It is of crucial importance that those who are involved in fighting against poverty be fully aware that this will be an undertaking in the long term and that it will need comprehensive support.

This training should also insist on the importance of networking.

Many organisations members of the Conference of the INGOs could share their long experience and participate in such training session aimed at combating poverty.

## **II.6. Information and communication on the rights of people living in Europe.**

Having no access to one’s rights is often resulting from a lack of information.

The States are responsible for making the necessary steps for a large communication on people’s rights and on how they can have access to these rights.

All the above requested investments will of course have positive immediate return as to the fight against poverty. Furthermore, they will be an efficient means for combating the persistence of poverty, the fight against the evidence that the children of the poor, in the present economic context, and if nothing is done, will in turn become poor and be excluded from the society.

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