

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

2010
European Year
for Combating
Poverty and
Social Exclusion



Local and regional responses to poverty and social exclusion

Proceedings of the Forum held at the Committee of the Regions on 8 June 2010 in Brussels



Introduction

As part of the 'European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion', the Committee of the Regions invited a number of local and regional authorities, organisations and EU institutions to exchange good practice and expertise in the fight against poverty and social exclusion at local level. Given the current climate of increasing unemployment and public deficits, knowledge on innovative approaches to social problems will become increasingly important for Europe's regions and cities. Some 200 experts from regional authorities across Europe discussed the political framework and 24 local projects, selected and grouped according to three thematic strands:

- Making local social services more accessible to all;
- Preparing people for integration into the labour market;
- Inclusive citizenship in urban and rural areas.

In the European Union, different groups in society face various social disadvantages in terms of income, gender, access to education and work, race or ethnic origin, disability or age. In 2008, 17% of the 500 million inhabitants of the European Union were living below the poverty threshold, which is set at 60% of the national income per adult. Social disparities have a strong territorial dimension and income or the risk-at-poverty-rate vary significantly between and within Member States. Increased social cohesion is one of the

objectives which the EU set out in the Lisbon strategy in 2000, and remains on the agenda of the 'Europe 2020' strategy, which the Member States agreed upon in June 2010. As the strategy states, the objective of "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" should lead to a 25% reduction in poverty within the EU % by 2020, lifting over 20 million people out of poverty, in particular through their better integration into the labour market.

Regional and local authorities often have to address social disparities caused by developments or policies over which they have little influence. Global economic developments can lead to the decline or collapse of traditional industries and affect unemployment and local taxes, too. Moreover, changes in national policy can influence social transfers and services, creating new challenges at local level. As far as are concerned social protection and inclusion, regional and local authorities are responsible for about one third of total public expenditure, representing an amount of about EUR 2,000 billion or 16% of GDP in 2008. In addition, they spend about 21% of their expenditure on education, with most Eastern Member States allocating about twice that amount to it.

Europe makes a difference when it comes to identifying and sharing local knowledge and experience in tackling social disparities. The Committee of the Regions will continue to be a partner for Europe's regions and cities to help facilitate exchange among them and feed their needs and recommendations into policy-making at EU level. As for other policy fields, Europe's regional diversity can be turned into an asset to help us better understand and fight poverty and social exclusion.

The Committee of the Regions would like to thank all the speakers and moderators involved in the event for their enthusiasm. Full speeches, presentations and a video may be found at: www.cor.europa.eu/EY2010



Opening Session

The battle against poverty is local: The “Europe 2020” strategy and the objective of “inclusive growth”



Moderated by **Jérôme Vignon**, former Director at the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the Forum began with a series of statements and a debate involving **Arnoldas Abramavičius**, Mayor of Zarasai District Municipality, Lithuania, Member of the Municipal Council, and Chairman of the Committee of the Regions Commission for Economic and Social Policy (ECOS), **Ilda Figueiredo**, Member of the European Parliament and Vice-Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, **Pilar Lucio**, Regional Minister for Equality and Employment, Extremadura, Spain, **Antonia Carparelli**, Head of Unit, European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, **Bart Vanhercke**, Co-Director, European Social Observatory, Brussels.

Mr Vignon opened the session by briefly introducing the programme and by stressing the background and the importance of the debate on poverty reduction and social inclusion namely in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy. In his view, regions and cities have a key role in this debate because it is them to design, finance and deliver social services of good quality to the citizens. He then presented the members of the panel and gave the floor to the first speaker.

In his welcome speech, **Mr Abramavičius** stated that the aim of the event was to give a voice to and improve the visibility of those people dealing with

poverty and social inclusion on a daily basis. He elaborated on the objective of the Europe 2020 strategy to reduce by 25% the number of EU citizens living below national poverty lines, and stressed that adequate funding would have to be made available to local and regional authorities if this target was to be achieved. The role which regions and cities could play in combating poverty had been consistently highlighted by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) in its work on this topic, especially through the ECOS commission. Mr Abramavičius concluded by stating that the CoR would remain committed to bringing a local and regional dimension to the debate that would be absolutely crucial for the successful implementation of EU-defined guidelines in the field of poverty reduction and social inclusion.

Ms Figueiredo began by stating that poverty levels had not come down in the last ten years, but had increased instead in recent years. Even without taking into account the consequences of the global financial crisis, 17% of EU citizens lived below the poverty line, with the highest concentrations being found in Southern and Eastern Europe. The most vulnerable groups included women, children and young people, and the elderly. This showed, Ms Figueiredo argued, that integration into the labour market was an important but not a sufficient condition for getting people out of the poverty trap. There was a need to focus on access to high-quality services for everyone, such as education, healthcare and homes for the elderly. The establishment of the Europe 2020

Jérôme Vignon



Arnoldas Abramavičius



Ilda Figueiredo



objectives for reducing poverty should therefore be accompanied by immediate and pro-active measures and policies which ensured that the target could be reached. Individual countries, too, had a crucial role to play, and should set priorities which took into account macro-economic factors, including the need to fight poverty by redistributing wealth.

Ms Lucio drew attention to the need to continue working on poverty reduction through new methods and social innovation, including continued cooperation between regions, for which sufficient support and finances should be made available. In this respect, the development of the 'green economy' was deemed to be particularly important for people in difficult circumstances, since it had the potential to ensure an inclusive economy with opportunities for people from all social backgrounds. Special attention also needed to be given to vulnerable groups and women in particular, especially in rural communities and in the context of an ageing population. Ms Lucio listed a number of other factors that should be dealt with to reduce poverty levels. Amongst others, she highlighted the importance of training, as well as the need to involve grass-roots organisations at local and regional level. The debate, she concluded, should also be about values, solidarity and equal opportunities for everyone, social responsibility for companies and the continued commitment of governments in economically difficult times.

Ms Carparelli argued that the current attempt to raise awareness about the issue and to boost responses was already a very positive sign. It had, she stressed, not been easy to get the poverty target included in the Europe 2020 strategy. This was mainly due to the fact that poverty was not sufficiently recognised as a European reality but was more a theme falling under the subsidiarity principle. Ms Carparelli also indicated that the current economic environment and the

subsequent calls for budget austerity had made policy-makers hesitant when it came to agreeing ambitious poverty targets. However, she noted, poverty reduction should not be seen as just a cost, but as an investment in human capital and in the future of the economy. This, she insisted, should become the key focus in the current debate on social inclusion and poverty reduction.

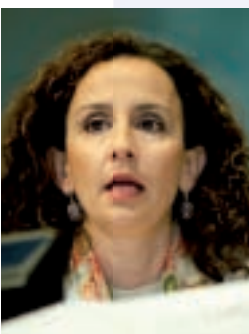
In his presentation, **Mr Vanhercke** discussed both the opportunities and risks resulting from the Europe 2020 strategy. The opportunities were connected to the fact that the social dimension had now been included in the political discourse once again. But it was also related to the application of new indicators and new targets and the establishment of the Poverty Platform as a flagship initiative. Amongst the risks, Mr Vanhercke mentioned the current uncertainty surrounding the architecture for the implementation of targets. It was still unclear, he argued, which governmental level would bear the responsibilities and what concrete actions would be taken to bring about the desired reduction in poverty. To Mr Vanhercke, it was clear that European cooperation on social inclusion was important for the regions, since the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) had initiated the adoption of targets on regional competencies. The regions should therefore be pro-active in contributing to these debates.

The subsequent **debate** with the audience covered questions regarding coordination between social policy and employment issues. In this context, it was noted that a sole focus on the 'activation' of people had proven to be unsuccessful, and that a balance between employment and new ways of social innovation and protection was needed. The discussion also turned to the particular role of the regions. In this context, it was noted that the regions had several competencies in the field of social protection since they were able to take decisions about their own financing and thus decide on which priorities were set. The panel also raised questions about the relation between the OMC and the European 'platform against poverty', a key initiative set out in the Europe 2020 strategy to ensure economic, social and territorial cohesion. It was concluded that there was no reason for the latter to replace the former. Finally, the speakers highlighted that poverty reduction needed to be part of an integrated, macroeconomic approach that prioritised social inclusion and actively attempted to involve the relevant organisations at local and regional level.

Pilar Lucio

Antonia Carparelli

Bart Vanhercke



Making local social services more accessible to all

Europe is considered to be affected by relative rather than extreme poverty, as there are still regions where people earn less than 60% of the average income per household. Relative poverty affects vulnerable groups such as children, people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, the elderly or unemployed people. They hardly benefit from basic social services such as public healthcare services, childcare, adult education or training courses, decent housing, or dependency support services among others. The eight projects presented as part of this theme in two workshops presented a number of local initiatives helping people to gain better access to social services. Both workshops were moderated by **Freek Spinnewijn**, Director at the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), Brussels.

The speakers at the first workshop were **Anna Maria Candela**, Director of Social Planning and Socio-health Integration Office, Regional Ministry for Solidarity, Social Policies and Migration Flows, Puglia, Italy, **Iain Johnston**, Operations Director, Faith in Community, Glasgow, United Kingdom, **Vesela Kolarska**, Deputy Mayor of Montana Municipality, Bulgaria, **Debbie Healy**, Commissioning Manager at National Health Service (NHS), North East Essex, United Kingdom

Ms Candela presented a special programme aimed at providing economic support to family units at poverty risk with non self-sufficient persons. With this policy measure, Puglia Region intervened on behalf of non self-sufficient people by: strengthening domestic social and health services, introducing economic support measures, testing simplified administrative

procedures, activating a web platform to manage economic support. She emphasised that investing in home services and improving the allocation of resources could make a real difference to the lives of families with non self-sufficient persons. Some projects developed by the region tackled issues such as: promoting a pro-active approach to accessing social services, recognising the work of private carers, providing financial assistance to newly formed families, economic support to help overcome situations of extreme poverty.

Mr Johnston spoke about how local people, motivated by their faith, could take action to improve community life. FiSCAF – Faiths in Scotland Community Action Fund – was a registered charity that worked with local faith groups as they built hope and struggled against poverty by providing grants and support in Scotland's most fragile urban and rural communities. People in the most vulnerable communities were often exposed to problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, low income, family disintegration and teenage pregnancy. FiSCAF provided grants of up to £15,000 for projects tackling poverty and exclusion, with a focus on reducing isolation and loneliness, supporting local people to help them become more resilient, and equipping people with the skills needed to improve community life.

Ms Kolarska presented a project called "Under One Roof". Its aim was to strengthen the child welfare system and implement the right of the child to be raised in a family atmosphere as a socially effective alternative to placement in institutions, by implementing a specialised range of services in the

Freek Spinnewijn



Anna Maria Candela



Iain Johnston



Vesela Kolarska



Debbie Healy



Municipality of Montana. The project focused on the management of products and services; the creation of a social services complex, deinstitutionalization and crisis support for children and families at risk; promoting social services development and services. It also focused on preventing child abandonment, combating deviant behaviour and violence and reducing the number of young people dropping out of school.

Ms Healy gave an assessment on the Reach Out Pilot Project which was run by the local Citizens Advice Bureau in the District of Tendring and jointly funded by NHS North East Essex and Essex County Council. The 6-week pilot project assisted people in areas of social deprivation within the district to increase their access to social services and reduce poverty and improve their quality of life. The work involved reaching out to people who did not readily turn to social services for assistance by knocking on doors and distributing leaflets. The Citizens Advice Bureau in Tendring gave advice to people about their rights and responsibilities, dealing with issues such as: debt, benefits, housing, employment, relationships, family matters, health, education, discrimination, immigration and the law. Following this successful pilot, the project would be extended to cover other areas over the next three years.

During the second workshop on the subject, presentations were given by **Angelica Pizzuti**, Cultural Foundation, City of Caserta, Campania, Italy, **Javier Ruiz**, Vice-Minister for Employment, Training and Inclusion, of the Basque Government, Spain, **Gerda van den Boogaard**, Communication Advisor, s’Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands, and **Shelagh Hetreed** and **Dalmar Osman**, Director and Co-director at Pax Pontis Ltd., Bristol, United Kingdom.

Ms Pizzuti presented a nine-month long project that examined three dimensions of poverty: the cultural, economic and social dimension. To address cultural poverty, an awareness campaign had been targeted at secondary schools to facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities, through a “bank of ideas” tactic. Economic poverty was being tackled by guaranteeing the integration of excluded people through innovative approaches involving industry and commerce. Social poverty would be combated through a databank which would be the starting point for relations with associations and parishes in order to exchange good practices. Also, a National Summit would be organized to enhance networking between schools, SMEs, chambers of commerce, active parishes and associations for each province (about 100 units).

Mr Ruiz demonstrated how the Basque income guarantee and social inclusion system had updated, strengthened and improved the Basque social protection model and also showed a decisive commitment to the social and labour market inclusion of excluded groups. The main aim was to bring the poverty rate to below 3%, making the Basque Country an EU leader in combating poverty and social exclusion. The plan proposed innovations in the field of benefits: for the first time it offered housing benefits as an automatic right, with an allocated budget of EUR 100.5 million. In addition, the Basque government provided a further two benefits: a basic allowance for social inclusion and protection and supplementary income support and specific assistance. The future challenges facing the Basque government were to change the law to transfer responsibility for income guarantee policies to the Basque Country’s Lanbide Employment and Training Service and to ensure that benefits were directly linked to finding employment.

Angelica Pizzuti

Javier Ruiz

Gerda van den Boogaard

Shelagh Hetreed

Dalmar Osman



Ms van den Boogaard started by saying that poverty was a relative concept as the Netherlands was the third richest country in Europe. The Per Saldo Positief public campaign was one of over 40 projects which the municipality of s'Hertogenbosch had launched to tackle poverty. The city council wanted to achieve a 20% increase in applications for special assistance over a three year period. The strategy of the public campaign sought to reach the target group directly, through posters in local buses, news on local television and public information channels, hospital radio/television, radio adverts, video clips (e.g. on local TV) in several languages, as well as via Youtube, which turned out to be the best way of spreading the message. In order to solve the language problem, they produced a video clip in two languages – Arabic and Tarifit, explaining what the municipality could do for the Moroccan community if they were short of money.

Ms Hetreed and **Mr Osman** gave an overview of the Bristol Consortium of Migrant Community Services which provided a link between social services and local communities. The project brought together six migrant communities through the services that helped them to work in partnership across faiths, languages, races and cultures. Moreover, Pax Pontis, the company that ran the project, had set up regular forums, where groups met potential funders and stakeholders. These forums had opened up a dialogue and contributed to the education of those who served their communities. It formed an alliance that met regularly, playing the part of a platform for sharing experience and knowledge, and also delivering effective and tangible solutions. They were specialized in tackling segregation, capacity building, preventing violent extremism, leadership and skills development.



Preparing people for integration into the labour market

The financial and economic crisis, which had hit certain cities and regions hard, could provoke a lasting polarisation of the disparities existing between the regions of Europe, thus reducing people's access to work, and equal opportunities for a better quality of life. One of the most recurrent causes of relative poverty in Europe was unemployment, closely followed by low-paid jobs and insufficient training. One of the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy was to achieve inclusive growth by increasing labour participation and ensuring a closer match between labour supply and demand. Over the course of two workshops, eight local projects were presented showcasing different approaches regarding how to integrate people into the labour market. Both workshops were moderated by **Robert Anderson**, Head of Unit, Living Conditions and Quality of Life, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin, Ireland.

During the first workshop, presentations were given by **Allan Alaküla**, Head of Tallinn EU Office, Estonia,

Robert Anderson



Allan Alaküla



Jochen Krautstein



Lieven Monserez



Anna Sikorska





Jochen Krautstein, School Administration, City of Arnsberg, Germany, **Lieven Monserez**, Regional Director with Groep Intro, Brussels, Belgium, and **Anna Sikorska**, Manager of the Municipal Centre for Social Services (GOPS), Lubicz Municipality.

Mr Alaküla stressed that Estonia had to deal with unemployment rates of 20% and therefore needed to find solutions for massive mainstream unemployment, and not merely for groups on the margins of the labour market. He presented a project entitled “Subsidised jobs in Europe – ideology, legislation and practice” which attempted to bring together knowledge and best practices from around the EU on measures for tackling unemployment through the creation of jobs in the public sector. One of the project’s findings was that there was a need to communicate to the public the urgency and legitimacy of subsidised jobs. It was also necessary, Mr Alaküla argued, for subsidised jobs to be given the legal status of social aid, so that they could be granted full tax exemption. Furthermore, he suggested that the EU should get more involved, while municipalities should take responsibility for setting out the standards for subsidised jobs.

Mr Krautstein presented the “ProBe” project, which aimed to improve the employment prospects of young people by encouraging and supporting apprenticeships at an early age. The project gave year

7 school pupils a substantial overview of a variety of different occupations, prompting them to develop new skills and identify their weaknesses. The students used their extracurricular time to try out different types of occupations. When they reached ninth grade at school, they decided on one particular occupation, and followed intensive in house training in this area at a company. Students were actively followed-up by teachers and social workers, and those who were successful received a certificate at the end of their apprenticeship. The results, Mr Krautstein said, were exceedingly positive, with 90% of students participating and a very high acceptance rate by both parents and students.

The presentation by **Mr Monserez** demonstrated the work of the NGO “Groep Intro” in Brussels. Mr Monserez began his presentation with an overview of the current unemployment situation in Brussels, where up to one third of all children grew up in a family with at least one unemployed parent, and where one fifth of young people left school without any qualifications. The project of “Groep Intro” aimed to empower, and strengthen the social skills of these disadvantaged groups by providing them with vocational training and socio-occupational support. In addition to specific employment-based classes, the project also offered educational support and free time activities. Mr Monserez highlighted the diversity of participants’ profiles as well as the project’s attempt to focus both on the needs of the participants and the demand from the labour market. Given that 70% of participants had been successfully integrated into the labour market, the project had indeed been successful. Because of the

high satisfaction rates, participants frequently recommended the project to friends and family, thereby ensuring a steady flow of new candidates.

Ms Sikorska presented a social inclusion project in Lubicz, Poland. It focused on those groups most at risk of exclusion, primarily people who received social assistance and people with low levels of education and skills. More than 60% of participants were women. The objective of the project was to increase the social and vocational activity of participants through personal skills development and practical support to families and individuals in carrying out their daily duties. Participants were divided into two groups depending on their profile, and took part in therapeutic and motivational workshops and job-specific training. They were also given access to specialist advice and family assistance where necessary. The results, Ms Sikorska said, had been positive. Over 30% of people had been successfully integrated into the labour market, and almost 50% had significantly increased their professional qualifications.

During the **debate**, a number of questions touched on people's motivations for participating in the presented projects. In some cases, it was argued, financial incentives could play a role. Mr Monserez, for example, indicated that the participants in the Brussels project had received a small amount of remuneration for every hour of training which they had followed, and that particularly vulnerable groups such as young mothers were given additional financial support. The participants also raised the issue of investment. The introduction of private enterprises in the welfare sector, some panellists argued, had been counterproductive and had shifted the focus to a results-based approach which ignored the diversity of needs that existed. This often meant that the most difficult groups, for whom integration

into the labour market was not self-evident, were being left behind. Finally, the audience also debated ways of overcoming the difficulties in dealing with participants from different ethnic, religious, generational and cultural backgrounds.

The speakers at the second workshop on the subject were **Maria Klingelstein**, Director at the Centre for Vocational Education (BBZ) Augsburg, Germany, **Joop Einhaus**, Manager of Buurtsupport, Emmen, The Netherlands, **Duncan Wells**, Director at the Refugee Education and Training Advisory Service (RETAS), Leeds, United Kingdom, and **Violetta Nilsson** and **Gunilla Malm**, City of Malmö.

Ms Klingelstein then presented the "BQE 2009" project, which provided professional training and social care for long-term unemployed men and women in Augsburg, Germany. To ensure the sustainability of the project it relied on close cooperation between a large number of partners in the Swabian region. By accommodating for the needs and demands of SMEs in the region, the programme was able to provide so-called 'tailored training'. This was done through the development of key practical skills, organised in parallel modules. Participants were evaluated on a continuous basis, and those who finished the training programme were awarded a qualification passport. According to Ms Klingelstein, 40-60% of all participants received their certificate, and a similar percentage found work. She concluded that the project clearly enhanced social participation and opportunities for joining the labour market.

In his presentation, **Mr Einhaus** brought his experience from his work at "Buurtsupport" in the city of Emmen

Maria Klingelstein



Joop Einhaus



Duncan Wells



Violetta Nilsson



Gunilla Malm



to the table. He started by setting out the historical and social context of the city, characterised by high levels of low skilled workers. The “Buurtsupport” project functioned with a mandate from the local government and primarily focused on those groups that had debt problems, suffered from drug abuse or were illiterate. The problems that these groups faced, Mr Einhaus stressed, were frequently family-related as well, which meant that it was not always easy to approach people directly. The project therefore attributed a lot of importance to direct support services, which both benefited people in poverty and helped them gain trust in the project. This was conducive to persuading people to take part in social activation and participation activities. The positive outcome of this approach was clear as it had led to a decrease in poverty; an increase in social cohesion, and the regeneration of poor neighbourhoods. Mr Einhaus concluded that similar circumstances existed all across Europe – he therefore felt that the approach adopted by “Buurtsupport” deserved further attention.

Mr Wells presented a project run by RETAS which focused on the integration onto the labour market of refugees and asylum seekers through education, training, re-qualification and employment. Unemployment amongst refugees in the United Kingdom, he said, was 6 times above average and there was a lot of misunderstanding among employers regarding the rights and entitlements of refugees and asylum seekers. This created a barrier to work and education, a situation that was further exacerbated by language issues, a lack of UK experience, legal constraints and financial difficulties. RETAS provided information, advice and guidance with regard to job hunting and CV writing; offered grants and English classes, organised specific job skills courses and helped prepare candidates for University. They also prepared highly qualified professionals such as doctors and teachers for integration onto the UK labour market, and helped recommend them to employers, universities and external agencies. With an employment rate of 40% amongst participants within the first 12 months, the programme, Mr Wells said, should be viewed as a success.

The final presentation was given by **Ms Nilsson** and **Ms Malm**, who presented a project carried out in cooperation with the city of Malmö and Swedish Social Services, which was funded by FINSAM, a federal

coordination platform in the area of welfare work. The project’s target group comprised people registered at the Malmö Social Office and within the Swedish Social Insurance system, including individuals with rehabilitation needs, people with mental illnesses and people with long-term disabilities. By identifying the individual resources and needs of the project’s participants, it was possible, the presenters argued, to offer efficient solutions and thereby increase the individuals’ work capacity and long-term prospects of labour market integration. The participants were also offered conversational therapy, supportive help, specific job training and a large number of group activities in the context of communicational and personal skills development.

The audience was then given the opportunity to ask questions and **discuss** the different presentations. The audience expressed an interest in hearing more about the sources of funding for the various projects. The speakers indicated that money came mostly from public sources and was often split between different authorities and different levels of government, including EU level. Regarding the RETAS presentation, there were large similarities with the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in France. Asylum seekers were not legally allowed to work in France either, which was seen as a major obstacle on the road to social inclusion. The knowledge and expertise that people could bring from abroad, it was remarked, was rarely recognised and was often even seen negatively, even though 60% of clients in the RETAS project were actually highly skilled and thus represented a large economic asset. The debate also touched on the topic of dealing with people from very different backgrounds, and on the importance of shaping and maintaining good contacts with potential employers in SME’s.

Inclusive citizenship in urban and rural areas

In spite of Europe's efforts to eradicate poverty, 17% of its population was still living below the poverty line, which was unequally distributed between urban and rural areas. While the majority of the poor lived in urban areas, the risk of being and remaining poor was usually higher in rural areas due to lower income levels and less opportunity to access social services. Disadvantaged groups could suffer additional problems which prevented them from fully participating in city or village life. As clear social, economic, cultural, political, environmental similarities and differences existed between rural and urban communities, fighting against exclusion could be seen as being a very local issue. In response, the Europe 2020 strategy aimed to increase inclusive growth and territorial cohesion, so that people could benefit from the same opportunities irrespective of where they lived. The presentation of eight cases and the subsequent debates over the two workshops were moderated by **Marit Schweiker**, Policy Officer, at the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

During the first workshop on the subject, a number of projects were presented by **Annette Perdaens**, Administrative Director, Heath and Social Observatory, Brussels, Belgium, **Shelagh Hetreed**, Director with 'journeying, Bristol, United Kingdom, **Audrone Barauskiene**, Head Deputy of Social Support Department, Šilutes District Municipality, Lithuania, and **Martin Johnstone**, Poverty Truth Commission, Glasgow, United Kingdom.

Ms Perdaens gave a brief presentation on The Observatory for Health and Welfare, Brussels-Capital



Joint Community Commission, which brought together political, academic and practitioner communities and people facing poverty. She presented the report on poverty, which was divided into several chapters: an annual social barometer that developed statistical indicators of poverty, the participatory contribution of a target group, an exchange of ideas between field workers fighting poverty and an action plan to fight poverty. The methodology used since 2008 focused on target groups and in 2010, the plan was to tackle the situation of homeless people. The poverty report was the result of a participatory process, during which knowledge generation, better lawmaking and services, stakeholder participation and public debate were of key importance.

Ms Hetreed stated that the aim of the project was to open dialogue between people in the community, to help them define their goals and to empower them so that they could achieve them. The target group comprised 30,000 Somali people in Bristol. During the project, they were helped to search for their own identity as Somali, British, African or school teenagers.

Marit Schweiker



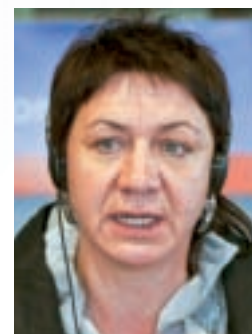
Annette Perdaens



Shelagh Hetreed



Audrone Barauskiene



Martin Johnstone



The project involved a number of activities such as: fashion shows, a fashion book, and Zahirah, a role model event.

Ms Barauskiene stressed that the purpose of the social partnership developed by the Šilute district municipality was to promote positive community action and care in order to generate welfare. The idea behind the partnership was developed together with stakeholders, and relied on both external and internal resources for the provision of broad services. In delivering these services, the authorities aimed to detect needs as early as possible. According to the statistics, some 56% of the local population needed social services. Together with the social partners (NGOs) and local politicians they had created a network of social services for the community, relying also on the media partners to deliver an awareness-raising campaign. They had completed a number of specific projects such as the conference on “Civil society’s role in the fight against poverty and social exclusion”, the celebration of the social worker’s day, the cooperation agreement between Sweden and Šilute Ljungby urban societies, organizing various forums, seminars, dissemination campaigns, the project “Sustain your neighbour”, the charity shop “Parama”, the “House of kindness”, and the “Kindness Day”.

Mr Johnstone explained that the idea of the Poverty Truth Commission was rooted in South Africa and New York and involved bringing together two groups of 14 people each - those who experienced poverty in their everyday lives and those who had the power and influence to change the situation in Scotland (politicians, civil servants etc.). It involved a 30 minute discussion in front of 400 people, using dance, drama, poetry, rap, dialogue and monologue to describe solutions for how to tackle poverty. The group of

influential people committed themselves to changing policies, in areas such as how people in poverty were represented in the media, positive alternatives to violence as well as Kinship Care so as to bring about an impact on local communities. In order to achieve these objectives, there was an important need to build relationships, engage in conversation and to place people in poverty round the same table with the politicians.

One of the points raised during the **debate** was that it was difficult to achieve changes in the behaviour of politicians and institutions, even when the social services and people in poverty, and especially NGOs, showed openness, receptivity and creativity. One of the issues raised concerned the fact that there was too much talk about strategies and policies rather than concrete action. The answers outlined that it was important to work with people who felt alienated and with politicians who needed to meet people living in poverty, and that building a new world for these people would take time.

The four projects presented during the second workshop on the issue saw contributions from the following speakers: **Gerry Andrews**, Neighbourhood Manager, Bradford, United Kingdom, **Frederico Paixão**, Department of Social Welfare of the Lisbon City Council, Portugal, **Wioletta Kunicka-Kajczuk**, Head of Department of Prevention and Implementation of Social Programmes, Mazovian Centre for Social Policy, Poland, and **Laurent Demoulin**, Director of the association Diogènes, Brussels, Belgium.

Mr Andrews started with a few thoughts regarding the discussions which had taken place during the first workshop on the importance of people and relationships. He gave a brief presentation on Bradford

Gerry Andrews

Frederico Paixão

Wioletta Kunicka-Kajczuk

Laurent Demoulin



and the overall aim of the project, which was to improve the quality of life for people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods or on the streets. The NGO sector delivered a service to build a common vision and a process that aimed to empower people so that they could influence decisions taken in the area. The inputs of the project consisted of a three-year leverage grant fund amounting to a total of £348,000. The success of the project was determined by the NM Team, the partners' time, energy, commitment and the mainstream agency resources. Some of the obstacles were related to people relying too much on politicians rather than on creating strengths among the people themselves.

Mr Paixão explained that the Municipal Council for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (CMIPD) was created in 1997 as an advisory structure of the Lisbon Municipality, bringing together 26 organisations which allowed people with disabilities to play an active role in the implementation of policies and measures facilitating their social inclusion. The CMIPD was led by a Chairman with political powers, an executive commission and three working groups on accessibility and mobility; education, training and employment; and culture, sport, and leisure, all of whom carried out activities on their own or in cooperation with other NGOs. The CMIPD issued opinions and advice about municipal policies and projects, proposed specific action for equal opportunities and the social inclusion of people with disabilities, and promoted public opinion awareness and information campaigns on disability.

Ms Kunicka-Kajczuk presented a Mazovian local-government programme that aimed to minimize disproportions in the standard of living among the region's inhabitants, to create equal opportunities for the development of children and young people living in families and communities at risk of all kinds of exclusion such as environmental, economic and digital exclusion. The Mazovia region was confronted with problems such as unemployment, alcohol addiction and intellectual poverty. The 'Sunny Summer' project implemented by The Polish Scouting Association was a preventive and therapeutic programme for children and young people living in families with alcohol problems which aimed to help them develop their interpersonal skills, to make them aware of the problems of addiction, and to compensate for the negative influence of the environment in which they lived. During the project, the authorities organized

holiday camps at six campsites, along with professional preventative and therapeutic workshops, recreational, sports, tourist, and cultural activities. 2250 young (aged 8-15) people from the Mazovian region took part and 50% of the children and young people (750 – 780 persons) living in families with alcohol problems were eager to continue working on their personal development. The project funding, which amounted to PLN 1.3 m (approximately EUR 0.3 m), came from special levies charged on alcohol sales.

Mr. Demoulin explained how the solidarity housing' project could provide an alternative to the usual type of housing offered to homeless people who were unable to cope with living alone in individual housing or who could not afford it. The social housing agency 'Logement pour tous' (Housing for everyone), the night shelter 'Pierre d'Angle', the assisted living facility 'Fami-Home', the accompanying service for minors in difficulty 'Les Sentiers de la Varappe' and the social workers from 'Diogènes' had all combined forces to create a new form of integration assistance: accommodation for those who lived on the streets. Social workers provided support and guidance for the people concerned. Three to six people shared the dwellings (for a maximum period of 18 months, with a monthly rent of about EUR 250), which included both private and common living areas. Private house owners, who wished to help support a useful social project, could hand over the management of their houses to the social housing agency, who would first ascertain whether or not the property in question was adapted to community life and ensure that it included private living areas for all residents. This innovative project had many strong points: insertion through housing, participation, partnership and networking, not to mention the low cost of the project: The project had given concrete results : providing the homeless with access to accommodation (59 people had passed through one of the solidarity housing buildings and 60% of the people who had taken part in the project were still currently in accommodation), reintegration onto the job market (several of the participants had managed to find work again), and personal development in a spirit of solidarity and building human relations.

The **debate** concerned the question of how we could ensure that policies followed good practice and not the other way around. It was generally agreed that that a change of mindset was needed to influence policy,



and that good results had to be transposed into general practice. Moreover, the involvement of local authorities was crucial, especially in terms of funding issues, and political powers should manage these initiatives directly, and be aware of what happened on the ground. In addition, several questions focused on the challenges which needed to be met at local and EU level in order to make social work more effective. The participants also highlighted that the voluntary sector should not depend on public authorities in areas other than funding and the legal framework. The debate also touched on the issue of how the European Social Fund could have helped finance micro-projects aimed at building people's trust and how this could be achieved in the future, as it was not at the centre of the fund. The last question concerned how the media could play an effective role in changing the perceptions of society by controlling and influencing the message in different ways, using multiple channels, especially the Internet. **Ms Schweiker** concluded that there were good examples everywhere, that the starting point should be the needs of the people, to develop good practice, that there were cross sector roads with the public authorities, but that their role should be mainly related to funding and creating a legal framework.

Closing Session

The closing session was moderated by **Jérôme Vignon**, former Director at the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The three moderators were asked to briefly present the outcome of the workshops which they had chaired. The closing remarks were made by **Nichi Vendola**, President of the Region of Puglia, Italy, and Member of the Committee of the Regions. **Mr Vignon** opened the closing session by praising the good examples of how to tackle poverty and social exclusion which had been presented at the workshops. He then gave the floor to the moderators of the workshops, who summed up the key points of the sessions.

According to **Mr Spinnewijn**, one of the key messages from the workshops on access to social services was the fact that the role of social services in creating social cohesion was not fully recognised at EU level. He summarised the key findings as follows:

Need for information and awareness: Users and potential users of social services needed to know what their rights were and what kind of services they were entitled to. Reaching out to them was crucial.

Legislative work: The Basque example had shown how legislation could be used to create a social inclusion system and improve access to social services.

Linking individuals and service providers: It was very important for the available services to be matched to the real needs of people who could also be allowed to create services for themselves. There were many efficient small scale projects for tackling poverty and social exclusion but EU level funding was not readily available to them. The EU should be more open to the idea of supporting these types of projects.

He added that it was essential to ensure a partnership between stakeholders and that an integrated approach was vital for crisis prevention. Innovation and creativity should also play a key part in finding solutions to help fight poverty and social exclusion.

Mr Anderson presented the conclusions from the two workshops on preparing people for integration onto the labour market. He underlined that many groups of people were far removed from the labour market. Some of them had never been employed or had only been in employment for a short period of time. Therefore, the issue was not only how to employ them

but also how to retain or reintegrate them into the labour market. The reasons for unemployment were diverse. We needed to gain a better understanding of the underlying problems, how to recognise the positive values which these people could bring and how to match their rights, talents and possibilities. He emphasised the importance of the need for information and understanding as well as the important role that education and training played in preparing people for employment. A significant part of the discussion concerned ordinary jobs such as cleaning services, manual work etc. which didn't get a high profile in EU debates. Needs were diverse, therefore there was no uniform approach to solving the problems. A holistic approach would be necessary and tailored services should be established for the different groups of unemployed people.

To sum up the conclusions of the workshops on inclusive citizenship in urban and rural areas, **Ms Schweiker** started by asking how strategies and policies could be related to work on the ground and how to we could ensure that policy followed good practices. It was important to take the needs of the people as a starting point, to develop good practice and to turn them into policy (thus a bottom-up approach). To implement projects successfully, all stakeholders and ultimately society as a whole needed to be involved. Poverty was not a problem of the poor but a problem of our society. Learning from each other was also crucial if we were to avoid paternalism and address the real needs of the target group. The catchwords were: respect, identity, empowerment, dialogue among equals. People in poverty should not actually be seen as a target group but be seen as partners at the table from the beginning to the end. The motto should be 'nothing about us is for us without us'. The following points may be learned from the workshops and be applied at national and European level:

- It is essential to involve other sectors more effectively, not just social policies;
- Work against poverty should not be too dependent on public bodies;
- A clear and proactive legal framework does help;
- European structural funds should provide better support to successful micro-projects.

Mr. Vignon thanked the moderators for their presentations and added that dignity, dialogue and cultural conditions were key issues that one could only

discover by working on the ground. He underlined the importance of the local level and the involvement of key actors in addressing these issues. **Mr. Vignon** then asked **President Vendola** to deliver his keynote address.

Mr. Vendola argued that historic changes were underway in Europe. Although Europe might have been in the forefront of combating poverty and experienced progressive growth for decades, there were now 80 million people at risk of poverty, including 20 million children. The old idea of poverty was related to marginalised people, but today, the new idea of poverty stemmed from the lack of jobs and low income. A whole generation was experiencing difficulties in accessing the job market. **Mr. Vendola** said that a new continent could emerge from the current situation. Funding for the future should be reconsidered at both EU and national level. The welfare system needed to be less assistance oriented, but should promote positive values and talent. There was a need to reformulate the question and to ask 'what could people with disabilities or migrant workers do for us' and not what we could do for them. He emphasised that a detailed overview about poverty would be necessary if were to understand the key issues and put together good practices. If this became a shared experience across the EU, it could have a real impact.

Mr. Vignon ended the Forum by thanking all speakers and participants. He said that the Committee of the Regions could be in a position to press ahead with some of the key issues mentioned and include them on the EU agenda.

Jérôme Vignon



Nichi Vendola



As part of the 'European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion', on 8 June 2010, the Committee of the Regions invited a number of local and regional authorities, organisations and EU institutions to exchange good practice and expertise in the fight against poverty and social exclusion at local level. The event included an opening session, which was followed by debates around the three main themes of the Forum: Making local social services more accessible to all; Preparing people for integration into the labour market; Inclusive citizenship in urban and rural areas. A closing session summarized the key findings and conclusions. This brochure gives an overview of the contributions to these different sessions and the discussions which they generated.

More information;
www.cor.europa.eu/EY2010

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