

12th European Fourth World People's University

Citizens United for a Europe Active against Persistent Poverty

5 March 2012



European Economic and Social Committee - Jacques Delors Building, 99 rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels



Acknowledgements

This event was supported by Staffan Nilsson, President of the European Economic and Social Committee. The EESC provided logistics support and we would like to express our thanks to the staff who helped organise the day.

This project has been funded with the support of the European Commission in the context of the “Europe for Citizens” programme. This publication reflects only the views of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.



12th European Fourth World People's University: *Citizens United for a Europe Active Against Persistent Poverty*

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Imprimé en France
© Éditions Quart Monde, 2012
I.S.B.N. 978-2-913046-97-9
Commission paritaire : 09 10 G 87 118
33, rue Bergère 75009 Paris
www.editionsquartmonde.org

These proceedings are also available in Dutch,
French, German, Italian, Polish and Spanish.

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The minutes of these proceedings were drafted by the ATD Fourth World delegation for Europe:
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INTRODUCTION

Citizens United for a Europe Active against Persistent Poverty

This 12th European Fourth World People's University was jointly organised by the ATD ¹ Fourth World International Movement and the European Economic and Social Committee on 5 March 2012 in Brussels. It took place in difficult context, with a major economic crisis in Europe. Responses to precariousness and poverty are unambitious and they often only make provision for rights without substance. The most underprivileged people are increasingly being ignored, stigmatised and harassed by the authorities.

In choosing the theme for this European Fourth World People's University – **“Citizens United for a Europe Active against Persistent Poverty”**, ATD Fourth World was seeking to position itself among the values of the European Union which are dignity, liberty, equality, solidarity and respect for human rights.

A European Fourth World People's University is a meeting of people who have had difficult lives, who are fighting against extreme poverty, of citizens who feel solidarity with their struggle, and of European players such as members of the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Parliament, representatives of European institutions and activists from civil society. The aim of this meeting is to seek new ways of fighting against extreme poverty. It is an exercise in participatory democracy.

Some of the 180 participants have travelled a long way to be here, some have left behind their families and their daily lives, with all of their problems, in order to dare to share their experiences and their thoughts. Others have taken time off work or have chosen to be here despite leading very busy lives.

Delegations have come from 10 countries: Germany, Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. They include members of ATD Fourth World and other associations who have spent several months working on citizenship in the context of Regional Fourth World People's Universities or of citizen's forums. The three themes of the day are the result of this preparation:

- Citizenship: living together with our differences in our neighbourhoods, or towns, our countries, in Europe.
- Citizenship: access to fundamental rights for all.
- Citizenship: participation in public life and representation of the underprivileged.

The work done in the morning workshops and in the afternoon plenary session highlighted the obstacles faced by people living in poverty in exercising their citizenship, whether they reside in their own countries or whether they are stateless. Examples were given of action taken by citizens living in poverty and those who show solidarity, or by institutions, in order to improve the exercise of citizenship for all.

All of these exchanges gave rise to proposals aiming to ensure that all people are recognised as citizens and that they can be active in the fight against poverty, as it is essential that the European Union be built with the participation of all.

1-ATD: ATD: All Together for Dignity.

OPENING SPEECHES



Staffan Nilsson, President of the EESC, meeting a delegation from ATD Fourth World, 5 March 2012

STAFFAN NILSSON, President of the European Economic and Social Committee

“Good morning and welcome to the European Economic and Social Committee building. It is a great honour for me that you have chosen to come together here, as you have already done on several previous occasions”².

The fight against poverty is basically, the responsibility of national governments. However, the treaties have given the European Union an important role of co-ordination and as a driver of social policies. As a result of its status, the EESC is required to issue opinions on different themes to the European Council.

Today, discussions will focus on the goal of uniting citizens for a Europe Active against Persistent Poverty. *Citizenship does not simply mean freedom of circulation and the freedom to settle wherever you want to in Europe but is precisely the topic of today’s meeting – fighting against extreme poverty. 2013, the Year of Citizenship, could help us to create a feeling of belonging on the basis of European values, such as human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality and solidarity.*

Active citizenship, an undertaking in terms of European values.

Being an active citizen means calling into question the established systems and structures that form an obstacle to compliance with European and pluralistic values. It means promoting non-discrimination, justice and solidarity. *Today, there are political developments, here and there, political groupings, political agendas, that*

are working against European values.

In Europe, everyone is entitled to live with dignity, to have access to a whole set of economic, social and cultural rights. People living in extreme poverty should participate fully in society. When people live in poverty, they have the feeling of being excluded from society. Because poverty is far from being solely a monetary issue, a negative consequence of the poor redistribution of resources. Sometimes poverty means that people are deprived of their fundamental right of political participation.

This is why it is important that you have chosen to come together here. ATD Fourth World is proposing to discuss, in an open manner, subjects that are very difficult such as poverty and exclusion, with those who have direct experience of them, both emotionally and physically, and who should participate in these discussions as they form part of the solution.

At the EESC we pleased with this concrete approach which will, in the end, help us to create a society that is more inclusive and more democratic.

When I was elected President of the EESC, I used three key phrases:

- **Dialogue and participation.** Dialogue means talking to someone and also listening.
- **Growth and sustainability.** Growth must be sustainable.
- **Solidarity and development.** It is unacceptable that poverty should exist beyond the borders of the European Union. *Thousands of people, children for the most part, continue to die without access to food”.*

²-See table at end of the document in the appendix, for the themes of the 11 sessions of the European Fourth World People’s Universities, organised since 1989.

Finding partners in the fight against poverty



The organising team with Staffan Nilsson, President of the EESC.

MARIE-CÉCILE RENOUX, ATD Fourth World Delegate to the European Union

Marie-Cécile Renoux welcomed all of the participants, addressing the following words to the delegates from 10 countries: "Today, you'll be able to recount how you struggle every day in rejecting abandonment, what you do in the face of injustice, how you get involved.

By coming here, you have shown your hope of finding partners in the world of politics, who will commit themselves in an ongoing dialogue with you and who will then be able to pass on what comes out of this dialogue. These partners should have the imagination to find the resources, the levers

and the tools needed so that the lives of people who have been shattered by poverty, their courage, their resistance, their intelligence, will not continue to be ignored, but will be at the heart of discussions in the forums where the future of Europe is being constructed.

What sort of Europe do we want?

We want a Europe that has the eradication of extreme poverty as the criteria on which it is judged. Today, there are many citizens, who are actively involved in their organisations, their trade unions, working in European institutions, and who are mobilising for a Europe that puts the human being at the heart of its priorities. We want to make a contribution to Europe. Because a Europe that is designed

without taking the very poorest members of society into account will be built against them and they will be left along the wayside. But more importantly, Europe will be cut off from the contribution that these very poor people can make. We need your "expertise", because you know better than anybody, what it means to live outside the bounds of fraternity, of peace, of respect and of dignity.

On the eve of 2013, the European Year of Citizens, we would like to extend the scope of this year, so that it becomes an opportunity for new commitments to building a Europe, in which each and every one of us is able to consider ourselves as a true member of the human community, worthy of exercising our rights, like free citizens, equal and all standing together as one."

Being able to participate, a long road to travel

MARC COUILLARD, ATD Fourth World Activist, Belgium

"Like many of the other members of ATD Fourth World, I experienced poverty and exclusion throughout my youth.

My people are those who live in poverty and social exclusion. This experience of life marks us for ever, impacting on the way we see things and on the way we think. We all share the desire for an end to this poverty. We lived through poverty and we want to prevent others from suffering the way we did. We want our children to have a better life than we did, we want them to be able to learn. We want a better world for everybody.

These are all plans that we have deep inside of us, and this is why we're here today. But getting here is the end of a long road; we needed time, to take



it in stages, and we needed people to invest their energy.

When we have experienced too much suffering, we cut ourselves off from the world. We're always afraid as there are so many people who want to push their way into

our lives and decide things on our behalf. The starting point for the involvement of people who are excluded was when people came to meet us. They invited us to attend meetings. Little by little, we started to dare to speak, to participate in the theme of the meeting by contributing our experiences.

And then we were invited to the Fourth World People's University. A lot of us gathered together. It was a discovery. We weren't alone. We could exchange ideas with people who'd experienced the

same thing as we had. In the beginning, it was difficult to express ourselves as we weren't used to it. So often we'd been told that we were hopeless, that we were worth nothing, that our problems were our own.

The Fourth World People's University is a training forum that gives us strength, ideas and courage. We've learnt that we have responsibilities that we have to take if we want things to get better. We feel responsible when we think of all of those who are still suffering from extreme poverty and we don't want them to be forgotten and to remain alone.

But we've also discovered another responsibility – that of sharing our thoughts and our knowledge with all of those who wish to see the eradication of poverty and exclusion and to see human rights become a reality. Sharing knowledge means more than expressing oneself and listening. It means thinking together, acting together and building the future together.

All of us here today *want a Europe without exclusion, a Europe of Human Rights. We have become aware that you need us to achieve it. This is why we've come here today. We can't bring you any money, but we bring you our experience, our thoughts, our knowledge, to share with yours.*"

The Fourth World People's Universities prepared for this meeting.



Participants from Polish delegation. Brussels, 4 March 2012.

Preparation by the Polish delegation

I DON'T FEEL AS THOUGH I'M A CITIZEN

- When they breach my human rights.
- When I show the social worker my electricity bill and she throws it in my face. It's shameful.
- When social services treat me like a child, telling me what I need and what I should do. It's as if I didn't exist.
- When I go to the different social service offices and I'm treated as though I'm trying to take advantage of them.
- When the pension for which I've worked all of my life isn't enough to cover my basic needs.
- When there are no mechanisms for social dialogue and consultation in our country.

I FEEL AS THOUGH I'M A CITIZEN

- When we feel that we're safe.
- When we all work together for the same cause.
In the small community in which I live, we've set up a small citizen's group. I help my neighbour with plumbing because that's something I know how to do.
- When we're supported by an organisation.
- When I can send a written request to social services. I feel like a citizen when they treat me normally and respect my rights.
- Being a citizen means acting together.

Citizenship : LIVING TOGETHER WITH OUR DIFFERENCES



Delegations from different countries in front of the replica of the commemorative stone laid in honour of the victims of poverty. Brussels, 4 March 2012.

We do not live alone, but surrounded by other human beings who have organised themselves to live together. With them, we form a society. We are citizens when we are in relationships with the others, when we feel respected, recognised, when we find our place.

Jürgen Klute, Germany: Our theme, 'living together', with our differences, is also at the foundation of the European Union. When we have a lot of links, at an economic level, at a social level, this helps to protect peace. Communicating and meeting are important. We must learn from the difference of the other. Poverty is increasing, and with it, confrontation and aggression in society.

Conny Reuter, President of the European Social Platform: The term used to describe 'living together' is 'social cohesion'. However, we forget that the issue of cohesion in our society is in danger because of the existence of poverty, exclusion, discrimination. We're in the process of losing the social fabric of our societies and often, we've built up everything on the basis of a vision that is purely economic. Unfortunately, the exercise of one's rights is often linked to a social status.

Living together with our differences

Jean Clément (Luxembourg): We are all human beings, why do we draw distinctions? Faced with differences, the most important thing is tolerance.

Astrid Bremer (Luxembourg): People also have to respect us. We're all worth the same. When we live on the street, we're all the same. Some people share with others, and others take advantage of people. The same thing happens on the streets. In order to survive together, with our differences, we need each other. When I was living on the streets, I learnt a lot. In order to survive poverty, we need each other, we have to live together and we have to join together, if not, we don't exist!

Julien Steinbrucker (Alsace, France): There are a lot of areas in which we sectorise and specialise. For example, there are schools for the rich and schools for the poor. It's good to be able to exchange ideas with people who are very different. This taught me how to build myself up and to develop.

Marie-Cécile Renoux, ATD Fourth World delegate to the European Union: At the moment in Europe, we get the feeling that we are feeding

fears and seeking to divide, rather than bringing people together. We give examples where, as we get to know each other better, we become really keen to experience special moments of solidarity together. During a Fourth World People's University in Brussels, a man who was originally from Africa said: "We've got massive problems in finding housing and we always thought that we were turned down because we were black." He thought that when he got an identity document, that things would be better. But he now says that he has the same problems as the Belgians who are living in poverty."

In its preparation for this European Fourth World People's University, the **Spanish delegation** explained³: you feel respected when the people from your own neighbourhood don't bother you, when a neighbour invites you to participate in an activity or an event, when you have the right to give your opinion or to vote, when people speak to you and listen to you, when you give and receive respect, when you discover your own dignity and when others also discover your dignity, when it's the human being that's at stake

Living together

Going out to meet people and participating in existing structures

Elsa Dauchet (Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium): Jean says that he feels like a citizen when he goes out to meet his neighbours, in a relatively mixed neighbourhood, to ask questions about their customs, in order to try and understand the differences between them. And he and his wife and children also go the "Ancre de Jeu". This is a place you can take your children to and where you meet other parents. It's accessible because it's free and you only have to pay 60 cents for a drink.

Necessary solidarity

Patrice Begaux (Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium): Some of the people who live in social housing projects have a lot of problems. So we'd like to meet the chairman of the

region's social housing project so that we can ask him concrete questions and get some answers. We want to be correctly informed before we approach the politicians.

G rard Didienne (Alsace, France): I feel like a citizen when I can send someone to the right government department. I help others through sharing my knowledge. I helped a neighbour in my building, who was in conflict with her boss and who didn't know where to go.

Marion Deniz (Germany): Five years ago, I set up an organisation for children in Prenzlau, driven by my own situation. We've got a clothing exchange for children and more importantly, people can come and talk about their problems, then together, we try to find a way forward. I've set up a network and it works quite well.

Importance of dialogue

G rard Didienne (Alsace, France): It's important to have the ability to make oneself understood and respected. We need to put in place the means for holding a real dialogue. I'm thinking of foreigners for whom it is even more difficult to communicate and to understand. We could give them more opportunities to learn French, but without forcing them.



Participants visiting the House of Knowledge. Brussels, 4 March 2012.

Sylvie Clause (Alsace, France): In order to help these people, there should be a lot more free French lessons, in the evenings after work. In the neighbourhood where I live, there are a lot of different nationalities and many communica-

³-A delegation from Spain had prepared to attend the European Fourth World People's University but could not come. Excerpts from their preparatory work have been included in these minutes.

tion problems between people. Premises could be found, where people could come together and talk in their own language and enjoy cultural exchanges, this would calm things down. There could be interpreters, paid for by the municipality, to help push things forward in the neighbourhood and to help foreigners with the bureaucracy they have to deal with until they gain independence.

Julien Steinbrucker (Alsace, France): We need to have forums for exchange on questions relating to daily life and spaces for citizens' debates that are accessible to all, and we should put in place conditions so that participation is possible for all.

Aurélie Duprès (European network of social integration enterprises): As we've heard here today, there is a real need for Europe to be built on the basis of proposals from all quarters, and especially proposals from the underprivileged. They understand, more than anybody else, the situations in which they live and the problems they encounter. We could approach Europe in order to determine which citizenship forums or places in which citizenship can be exercised are in fact open to the underprivileged. Here we can see, at the Fourth World People's University, that there is a real will to help these people to express themselves. What other forums for citizenship exist?

Marie-Cécile Renoux: We need forums where people can think together and in which the very poorest members of society are involved, not only with regard to poverty related issues, but with regard to what sort of world we're building together.

Learning from others

Gérard Didienne (Alsace, France): We need to



Game based on citizenship, brought by the Polish delegation. Brussels, 4 March 2012.

create bonds of friendship so that we can learn things from one another... Showing an interest in someone else's culture is a big step towards avoiding hurting that person.

Angèle Pens (Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium): A woman once asked me: "What does living on the street mean?" I learnt from this that there were people who didn't even know what we were talking about. I understood that it wasn't always easy to approach things from the other side either. We learn about differences at a very young age.

Julien Steinbrucker (Alsace, France): It's important that from a very young age, children's awareness should be raised about solidarity and about being responsible for their actions. They should be given all of the information they need about how our society works. They should be given practical know-how, and not just theory, about daily life, and they should be trained in how to discuss issues at school. This is how we'll be able to train real citizens.

Existing in the eyes of others

Spanish delegation: Feeling that you're being taken care of, that you are recognised, and in this way, little by little, you can get involved in your neighbourhood, not only amongst neighbours, but also, for example, at the local school.

Accepting others as they are

Astrid Bremer (Luxembourg): Seeking to be active, to do something against these injustices, my partner and I got involved in ATD Fourth World, in order to make contact with other people who are also living in poverty, to learn to accept others as they live, accept what they say. What I've understood is that it's important to help each other, to learn, to listen.

Creating a desire to live together

Elena Flores (Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium): It's not enough to bring people together, next to each other. We have to learn that there is a sort of desire to live together, that we can't do without others or let people down because we never see them.

Jean-Marie Saïssset (Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium): We can't simply be piled one on top of the other in a building. We must move away from this sort of piling up and to achieve this, we thought about creating

a house that would welcome all people. It would be a house of sharing which would have to meet several criteria. In particular, it would have to be accessible to everyone, no questions should be asked, and the door should be open over weekends. Ideally, we'd like it if all social classes were represented, if there were a mix of people, even if this is complicated. It is important that



this house be created by the inhabitants themselves, that it is the people who define their needs so that they can own it. And in this place, so that it is a place of exchange, there must be both giving and receiving, not only receiving, so that people are really able to share.

Elsa Dauchet (Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium): It will have to be somewhere accessible. Where there are people who are really in situations of extreme poverty. When public transport shuts down late at night, people who live in remote neighbourhoods are cut off from what's happening elsewhere. So we also have to think about what we're going to do in these neighbourhoods.

In an interview ⁴ after his workshop Conny Reuter came back to this suggestion of a house of sharing. This shows that in our society, notwithstanding the development of means of communication, there is a real lack of communication among citizens, they are isolated from each other, and they only exchange ideas with people who are like them. At a political level, how are we to construct links in society, and how are we to eradicate exclusion, not only through the use of legislation, but also through meetings.

Problems

"It's not all sunshine and roses"

Patrice Begaux (Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium): There is a lot of talk about social mixing. But in my view, no, it's just not possible. I don't see how you can have a block with 7 flats, 3 for people without much money and 4 for people who have a bit more money. And this way, those who have more money will subsidise those who have less. That's what I heard a minister saying. That's all very well, but on Saturday mornings, the rich people will go out and do their shopping and come home with loads of tasty things to eat, while the others will be looking out of their windows at them.

Elsa Dauchet (Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium): Patrice, what you're saying there is that social mixing has to be thought through very thoroughly so that it's not something violent. You can't just mix up the rich and the poor without thinking it through. You have to see all of the different shades of the matter and say to yourself that it's not all sunshine and roses. We can't just say: "We're all going to live together and we're all going to love each other." The idea of social mixing has to be thought through.

Anton Krüger (Germany): There are a lot of people who can no longer pay the rents in the neighbourhoods where they live. This means that they have to move to areas that are far away from their familiar neighbourhoods. As a result, there are now ghettos for the rich and ghettos for the poor. There is no longer any freedom on both sides, not for the rich, who are surrounded by security guards, nor for the poor, who are unprotected. What we need is enough suitable housing. The amount of money one has shouldn't make any difference!

There is the fact of being judged...

Angelina di Pasqua (Belgium): When people don't have enough money, when they are unemployed, they are made to think that they're guilty. And that's a problem that impacts on them personally, on their personalities. When others start saying: "Why aren't you working? It's your fault!", people no longer feel as though they're citizens, and that's a major problem.

4- See: <http://www.atd-quartmonde.org/La-12eme-Universite-Populaire.html>
Video on work done in workshops.

...and isolation

Marion Deniz (Germany): I think that we should also approach politicians and get them to create conditions that correspond to what's really happening in the regions. In my district of Uckermark, all of the structures from before the border was opened have broken down, from transportation to the family unit. Young people are leaving and the elderly can no longer go and see the doctor, do their shopping, etc. They live in total isolation.



Gathered together in song. Brussels, 4 March 2012.

Citizenship: LIVING TOGETHER WITH OUR DIFFERENCES...

... TO CONCLUDE

Dominique Béchet, ATD Fourth World Delegate, Europe: Those living in poverty don't ask us to grant them citizenship, they are citizens, and they want to be recognised as such. They are also active players in this citizenship. What Astrid said about solidarity is the first step towards citizenship. The poor aren't just standing about waiting for us to tell them: "We're going to give you the resources to become citizens". They are citizens, and they're trying to live as citizens. We must recognise all of their efforts, we must talk about it, and there must be forums where we are able to talk about it.

Conny Reuter : I believe that if we want to live together, then obviously we have to build up our lives based on mutual respect. We need a place, we need time and we need the motivation. How are we to organise time for living together?

Peter Verhaeghe (Caritas Europe): I think that it's very important that we talk about what we have in common and not only our differences. You were saying that your neighbour takes care of his family and that he also wants his children to have a good life. Well that's the same for everyone.

Jürgen Klute : Since I've been an MEP, this is the first time that I've taken part in a meeting where people who are not members of a privileged class have had the opportunity to describe their situations and to explain what's happening to them. It's very important and I hope that these meetings will continue. I'd like to thank you for inviting me. For me, this exchange has been very important and I'd like to encourage you to carry on the dialogue with other MEPs.

Suggestions for living together with our differences

In order to create **opportunities and conditions** for getting to know each other, for understanding people from different social classes, cultures, countries and age groups and to learn from our differences.

- Rethink town planning in order to avoid the creation of ghettos (for the rich and for the poor), to encourage social and economic mixing and to encourage exchanges between social classes.
- Raise the awareness of parents, schools, organisations and the media of the need to educate children, from a very early age, about solidarity and citizenship and to fight against stereotypes and exclusion based, from childhood onwards, on our differences.

- Encourage public authorities and organisations from civil society (associations, trade unions), to set up forums for citizenship, houses for sharing where people can all come together and where we can exchange, by both giving and receiving. These places should be set up with the help and contribution of the people concerned.

- Create meetings at all levels between political leaders and people living in poverty, so that both groups can understand each other, ask each other questions, have the means for a real dialogue and exchange ideas on proposals for improving policies.



Citizenship: ACCESS TO FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS FOR ALL

Respect of equal dignity for all and access to fundamental rights both condition our right to exist and to live in a dignified manner, and they also condition our citizenship. When you have no access to rights, you don't feel like a citizen: health, work, the right to family life, housing, the right to justice, education, the right to circulate and reside freely in the European Union (what we call free circulation).

Francesca Pettinato (Italy): I've been living in Rome for 10 years, but I don't feel as though I'm a citizen of Rome. For me, citizenship rhymes with having ID documents, receiving mail, having a doctor, and also being somebody for the government. But we, as poor people, we don't feel like citizens. If someone hasn't got a home, if he's got nothing, then he's got no citizenship, and he can't be a citizen of anywhere.

We've come here together so that fundamental rights for all will be respected.

Pier-Virgilio Dastoli, Spokesperson for the Forum for Civil Society: In 1995, we decided to create a Permanent Forum for Civil Society and we initially set ourselves the priority goal of equipping the European Union with a Charter of Fundamental Rights. Today it exists and it was written, thanks also to the active work of civil society, including that of ATD Fourth World.

Henri Lourdelle, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC): Rights in theory must become rights in practice. The important thing is that there should be laws in place and these laws should be effectively applied. It's a battle that we have to fight together. Within the European Trade Union Confederation (36 countries, 60 million members), I am responsible for the fight against poverty and social exclusion. It's a common fight for all of us and that is also why I'm here today.

Rights exist, but in reality, people living in extreme poverty can't take advantage of them.

We're ashamed, we don't insist on our rights

Volker Paul Boeken (Germany): In Hamburg, I have a lot of contact with the homeless, and I have experience of being homeless myself. People are ashamed of being dependent on long

term unemployment benefits (Hartz IV)⁵ or even of asking for them. They don't like going to social services because people look down on them. With Hartz IV, social services staff are in a position to decide whether to give the applicant the benefit or not. As long as people who are directly concerned, are not treated as equal partners, there is a form of exclusion and their citizenship is not respected.

Assunta Ielapi (Italy): When you're poor, you always feel weak. It's when others see the true value in you that you're able to lift yourself up. We need to hear it and to have opportunities to exchange ideas, to have access to meetings and training with others. This gives us the strength to confront the doubt that torments us and becomes part of our lives, and to think together that things can change.

When solidarity is punished

Gérard de Jong (Netherlands): I'm forced by the government not to show solidarity with people living in the street. People who decide to accommodate the homeless are fined by the government.

If you don't know your rights, the government can take advantage of your ignorance

Jean-Christophe Sarrot, Editor of *Feuille de route Quart Monde*, an ATD Fourth World publication (France): In France, half of all people who are entitled to the official minimum income (RSA), don't apply for it. And we don't get the feeling

⁵-The Hartz IV law: 4th stage in the reform of the labour market carried out in Germany from 2003 to 2005. Following this reform, unemployment benefits are no longer paid for 32 months, but only for 12 months (18 months for those over 55). This is known as *Arbeitslosengeld I*. After that, the unemployed person is considered as long-term unemployed and receives the *Arbeitslosengeld II*, a significantly lower amount. See Hartz Reforms, Wikipedia

that there is an effort to go out and help these people, like with the Belgian OMNIO ⁶ system. The government is very pleased to be able to save €3 billion on this RSA benefit ⁷.

Two systems of rights

Danielle Pierret (Champagne-Ardenne, France): Everyone should have the same rights, whether they're rich or whether they're poor. At the dentist, a poor person who is covered by the CMU (minimum health insurance) will get very basic treatment. Someone who's rich will get better treatment than someone who's poor.

Thierry Viard (Belgium): In France, there are some dentists who refuse to treat people who are covered by the CMU because they don't think it looks good to have poor people in their waiting rooms and because it's more complicated to manage the paperwork.

Rights that are recognised for all European citizens and which in fact, are inaccessible to the very poorest members of society (such as the right to free circulation)

Steve Hames (Luxembourg): Social benefits should be the same throughout Europe so that people can live where they want to, and not be forced to stay holed up in their own countries like prisoners! Because people are poor, they're punished by not being able to move to another European country and learn about its culture.

Astrid Bremer (Luxembourg): As a Luxembourgish couple, we're not entitled to government housing through the Housing Fund because to qualify, you have to have lived for 5 years in the same town or village, and we left our town for a while to go and live in Germany, on the other side of the border, because it was cheaper. But it's still Europe!

Jacques-René Rabier (Belgium): I'd like to suggest having a report drafted on the rights that are effectively recognised for European citizens and that

in reality are not accorded to the very poorest members of society (the right of establishment, free circulation, etc.)

Indivisibility and interdependence of rights – failure to respect a right leads to the infringement of other rights

The right to healthy food

Anne Thomas (Paris Region, France): When housing centres are full, families are put up in hotels. This situation is meant to be temporary but we know of one family which spent 8 years in a hotel, in a small room in which they were not allowed to cook. The result is a very poor diet.

The right to a private life

Pina Romani (Italy): I live in an emergency housing structure. I was meant to stay 8 months but I've already been there for 16 years. It's impossible to live in this place because we have no private life. You have to ask permission for everything, even for your son to live with you. At the reception desk, they ask visitors for their identity documents and they give them back to them when they leave. Why am I still living there? Because I'm living under the poverty threshold and for health reasons, I am unable to work. I receive minimum benefits. I have a son I support who has an unstable job.



Meeting between different delegations. Brussels, 4 March 2012.

6-Statut OMNIO: see box on page 18.

7-RSA: revenu de solidarité active; see final report of the RSA assessment committee - December 2011, appendix on failure to request the RSA:

http://www.social-sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Annexe_3_-_Le_non-recours_au_rSa_effet_sur_le_revenu_disponible_des_menages_modestes.pdf

“At the campsite, you become a refugee in your own country” delegation from the Netherlands

Jan Timmers: We lived on a campsite where over 150 pitches were occupied by permanent residents. These people included individuals and families who had been expelled from their homes for various reasons (debt, divorce, etc.) and for whom there were no other housing options elsewhere, along with the families of workers from other European countries. Because of the diversity of the population of the campsite and the traffic that runs through it, it has a bad reputation. It's called the Breda Favela.

Under the regulations, the campsite's intended use is for leisure purposes, so people are not supposed to live there permanently. If this does happen, the campsite owner can be given a substantial fine. The owner is keen to be paid rent by the people who live on the campsite, but discretely. Because of the lack of housing, social workers suggest that people go and live on the campsite. But because the campsite is intended for recreational purposes, people cannot use the campsite address for administrative formalities.

Furthermore, if you move from the commune where you live, after a certain period of time, your name is deleted from the administrative files of the municipality. Many people in the Netherlands thus have the status of “person residing abroad”. This means that they no longer have an officially recognised place of residence. Each municipality shifts responsibility onto another one with regard to the duty to provide support for the very poorest members of society, and with regard to the issue of identifying where people's officially recognised residence is and where their actual residence is. This is made even more complicated by the fact that the owner of the campsite will not allow the campsite address to be used as address for registering residents in the citizens' files of the municipality.

Other consequences, you lose your right to vote in local elections. If you can't provide an address, it's a lot more difficult to find work, and to get access to healthcare. And if your identity card has expired, it's very difficult to have it renewed. **You become a refugee in your own country. And this will also have consequences on the amount of your pension when you reach retirement age.**

Catherine Libeaut, President of the Association of French Citizens Abroad, Netherlands: When you no longer have a home, you no longer exist, you can no longer get health care, you can no longer get a decent pension, because you are no longer recognised in the country where you live. We cannot accept that!

Baudouin Sury (Belgium): The example of the Netherlands shows a form of local and regional administrative regulation that breaches the law. Situations like this should be referred to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, after all domestic channels have been exhausted. We cannot allow such situations to continue to exist, for the people who are experiencing this hardship and also for the future of their children.

People are fighting together in Europe for access by all to the rights of all.

Inform and work alongside people who do not insist on their rights



Delegation from the Netherlands. Brussels, 5 March 2012.

Henri Lourdelle, European Trade Union Confederation: Our work is not only to fight for the rights of workers, but also for access to rights for all. Even though increasingly, working conditions are precarious. We have to be militant, to fight alongside others like you in order to gain access to housing, to employment, to a reasonable income. What are we doing to take into account the situation of 20% (one out of five people) in the EU who don't know how to read?

The OMNIO status in Belgium

People who have experience of poverty and professionals work together to provide access by all to the right to healthcare

In Belgium, the OMNIO status enables people who have limited incomes to gain access to healthcare, by only paying the portion that is not reimbursed by the health insurance. But because people are not well informed or are put off by the complexity of the bureaucracy, only a small number of them actually apply for this status. In order to improve access to healthcare for all, the health authorities in Ostende and Antwerp have put in place the KAAP project (which stands for “low on luck, but a priority in terms of care”). Project staff contact people living in poverty, take the time to listen to their questions, go to their homes if necessary, and act as a go-between with the various administrative departments. This progress towards better healthcare for all is the fruit of dialogue and long-term work between associations, people living in poverty and the administrative departments and institutions in Belgium. A working group reads through and edits the pamphlets and letters in order to simplify them. They noticed that the logo of the health insurance department on the envelope was associated with a letter that was difficult to understand, and they decided on another, more neutral, logo for the KAAP project, so that it didn't put people off opening the letter.

The logo for the KAAP project, featuring the letters 'KAAP' in a stylized, colorful font. The 'K' is yellow, 'A' is red, and 'P' is green. The letters are slightly overlapping and have a 3D effect.

A fight that is based on the experiences of people living in poverty

Gérard de Jong (Netherlands): If you don't know what your rights are, the government can take advantage of your ignorance. Often, people living in working class neighbourhoods have learnt hard lessons from life, as a result of their difficult experiences and of being confronted with the unacceptable. This knowledge that they've acquired could be used in the fight for access to rights for all.

Staying in touch with our children in care

Delegation from the Grand Ouest, France: We're thinking about our children who've been taken into care. They've all been separated, they're far from us, far from each other, and they're suffering. My mum, my daughter and I can never see them. When we do go and see them, the social worker comes with us. It's impossible to be alone with them. We can't talk to them, everything has to go through the social worker. Nobody considers us. We wrote to the Judge and we saw him. We asked whether we could see our children without having to ask for permission in writing each time. The matter was heard by the court. Following that hearing we can see our children once a month without having to make an official application. The court listened to our arguments about access to rights. We

are continuing our fight for children to be placed in care as close as possible to their parents. We're fighting so that brothers and sisters are not all separated from each other.

Acting together for our neighbourhood

Assunta Ielapi (Italy): I have appropriated a right that I've adopted throughout my whole life – the right to fight, alone and with others. It's hard to be born with the stigma of poverty, of living on the edge of society, of exclusion! In reality, it follows you throughout your whole life. So you have to seize your destiny and create it, by helping your neighbours, people like you, who feel “different”. I struggled with other women



Tor Bella Monaca neighbourhood. Italy.

The Binding Right to Housing (DALO), a step in the right direction (Paris Region – France)

But it is not fully applied – the commitment and the mobilisation of all is needed

In France, 3 million families are not decently housed. On 5 March 2007, a law was voted, unanimously, which is something exceptional, which recognises a binding right to housing – the DALO. “Binding” means that the government can be forced to meet its commitment. A family without a home or living in a home that is too small or insalubrious, makes an application, and is declared priority “to be housed as an emergency”. Unfortunately, there is not enough housing. But if after 6 months, the family has not been given appropriate housing, it can take the matter to the administrative court, which will find against the Prefecture, which will have to pay an amount of €500 per month, until appropriate housing is found. This amount is not paid to the family which is seeking housing, but is paid into a solidarity fund.

A lot of people don't know that the DALO exists and they don't apply for housing. Others do, but even though they are entitled to it, their requirements are not always met because there is a lack of housing.

in the neighbourhood to improve Tor Bella Monaca, the neighbourhood where I live. Twenty years ago, when we opened the school, we had to clean it because the Commune didn't do so. We continued to fight in order to get a bus in the neighbourhood, because there wasn't one. In a run-down neighbourhood, the fact that you clean up sets an example and shows that things can change. We're fighting so that children are given help with their schoolwork and so that they are given an example of adults at their sides, who are different from those who buy luxury cars and who break all of the rules and the laws.



Decent housing for all. Spain.

Citizens get involved in the housing issue

Gérard de Jong (Netherlands): In the Netherlands, like in France, we have a problem with the right to housing. There are homeless people who have to go to a drop-in centre where they are given pocket money. But they don't know what their basic rights are! As a citizen, because I know about these rights, I can help them.

Baudouin Sury (Belgium): In Belgium, there is an organisation which signs a contract with the owner of a run-down building. The building is completely renovated and a contract is signed with the housing department, so that very poor people can be housed in conditions that are perfectly decent. These are citizens who have said: “It is unacceptable for people not to have access to housing. This is how we react, faced with this situation.”

Citizenship : ACCESS TO FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS FOR ALL...

... TO CONCLUDE

Europe and the Member States can and must move

Henri Lourdelle, European Trade Union Confederation: I'm rediscovering both a multi-faceted poverty but also within these facets, the makings of an answer, men and women who are on the move. I was struck by the question: “What can we do to be heard?” This is where our work together lies. And the first answer is, to join together.

Today, Europe has new preoccupations and is evolving – the example of education

Joost van Iersel, Member of the EESC: The whole decision-making process in Europe is oriented towards the economy. And you've been fighting

for 40 years already. The situation is changing though. For example, education was never really discussed at a European level before 2004. Today, it's a priority at the Council of Ministers, because education, knowledge, reading, writing and thinking are needs that everyone requires. They are needs required by society and consequently, they are also political needs.

Charles Goerens, MEP, Luxembourg: I'd like to respond to what was said regarding the responsibility of Europe in terms of the fight against poverty. It cannot be ignored that the fact that Europe, all in all, has very few resources for actively fighting poverty, is because the Member States haven't wanted to give it the necessary resources.

The responsibility falls firstly on the Member States. I'll never be able to accept this "passing

the buck" when it comes to the fight against poverty. Europe also has to do its job. Europe can do more in terms of applying the Charter of Fundamental Rights. It's not one or the other, it's one and the other. It's the interaction of the two that will lead to an answer.

Pier Virgilio Dastoli, Spokesperson for the Civil Society Forum: In Italy, we're working with other organisations on the minimum guaranteed income, which doesn't exist in Greece, in Hungary and in Italy. In order to achieve our goal, we are hoping to rely on an article in the Lisbon Treaty⁸ which enables one million citizens from at least seven Member States to request the Commission to submit a draft law.

⁸-The European Citizen's Initiative

Proposals for access to fundamental rights for all

Poverty should not be a cause for discrimination in access to rights.

- Social legislation of European countries faced with the mobility of people living in poverty

Social legislation of European countries should make greater provision for the mobility of people living in poverty who move in order to improve their living conditions. This mobility could involve maintaining certain rights and entitlements until these people become eligible for rights in the new country that they have chosen. Access to housing and social assistance are of particular importance.

There should be real freedom of circulation throughout Europe and the right to choose one's country of adoption should be applied. People living in poverty shouldn't be condemned to remaining in the same place for their whole lives.

- Municipalities should organise themselves so that it is easier for people to register with them.

Nobody has access to social rights if they are not registered or housed.

Municipalities should organise themselves in order to facilitate the registration on their population registries of poor people living within their boundaries who do not apply for aid, and they should try, with the help of social services, to understand the reasons why these people do not apply for aid.

No European citizen living in extreme poverty should be rejected everywhere, and **he or she should not become a refugee in his or her own country.**

The duty to help the very underprivileged should be better defined. Whose responsibility is it? The municipality where the person last officially resided, or the municipality where he or she actually lives now?

By better defining this responsibility, municipalities will reduce the risk of being found guilty of failing to comply with the European Convention of Human Rights. In fact, the European Court of Human Rights could rely on several articles of the Convention in order to find against certain authorities that authorise this type of practice – right to respect of property, right to freely choose one's residence, right to respect of one's home.

- The authorities should go out looking for people who don't apply for their rights.

Authorities that provide services or benefits should do all that they can to try and find people who do not apply for their entitlements and to identify the reasons why they do not do so. They should be given help by other public or social services who are in contact with people living in poverty. Poor people should be consulted on the methods for approaching them, which could facilitate access to rights for all.

Suitable communication should be made. Rights and entitlements should be clear and should be **written in language that everyone understands.** We should reach out towards people who we are unable to contact via forms and pamphlets.



Citizenship: PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE AND REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

Being a citizen, means speaking out, giving one's opinion, debating, being involved in decisions, contributing to the implementation and the assessment of policies, voting, having representatives.

Egbert Holthuis, DG Employment: The Commission can encourage Member States to take the aspects of poverty into account. Until now, unfortunately, Member States have not done so. Political and financial aspects are on the agenda, but not poverty. In order to collect more arguments in your favour, I'm going to listen to you and by taking on board what I learn from you, I'll be able to represent you even more in the Institutions.

Anne Degrand-Guillaud, Co-ordinator of the European platform against poverty, DG⁹ Employment: You are all ambassadors of your countries and of the social situation in your countries, and I come from the European Institutions. We've all been sent by our worlds which are not the same. We have to find a common language so that we can understand each other, build a bridge between these two worlds.

Judy McKnight, Member of the EESC, President of the section "Employment, Social Affairs, Citizenship": I'd like us to use this workshop to make the voices of a larger number of people heard, to glean concrete ideas and I'd like it if governments could finally listen to what is the truth.

Being a citizen, means being able to give one's opinion and having that opinion taken into account

On the local youth council, I gave my opinion and that of the young people I interviewed.

Abire Harizi (Lorraine, France): In my old neighbourhood, there was a local youth council, where young people could come and express themselves. It was run on a voluntary basis. Through these meetings that I held every week, I used to give my opinion and set up projects for the young people in my town. The young people used to decide for the young people. Because each youth who came to the meeting spoke about what was going on around him or her, in their school, with



A morning workshop preparing a short play for the plenary session. Brussels, 5 March 2012.

their friends. I took part from the age of 12. I was taken into consideration and my opinion was sought and that's why I feel like a citizen and that's why I'm interested in what's going on around me. I was approached and told: "Yes you, I want to know what you think, tell me what you want to, you've got the right to say it, and we'll listen to you."

The delegation from **Nord-Pas-de-Calais** (France) presented a little play, showing a counter example, of a young person from an underprivileged background who's been invited to attend a meeting of a municipal youth council. "Cool! I'm going to be able to contribute some ideas about changing things" he says. At the first meeting, he finds himself along among a group of students who are talking about their studies and their plans to study abroad (Erasmus). Nobody introduces themselves and everybody talks at the same time. The youth tries to get a word in but nobody listens to him. He goes away saying: "There's nothing for me here!"

Difficult to be a member of the parents association when you were never valued at school.

Delegation Centre-Loire (France): When his son went to secondary school, Mr. C thought that it would be a good idea to get more involved and

⁹-DG : Directorate Generale

he asked to become a member of the parents association. He was elected and sat on the School Council for a year. It was a difficult year. At meetings, although nobody lacked respect for him, he noticed that he was often lost because of the vocabulary used, that it was difficult to make himself understood and to manage to construct and express his ideas in meetings. He got the feeling that that when a working group had to be set up or a decision taken, it was done without him and he was left out. After a year, he gave up his seat on the School Council, a bit bitter, saying that he didn't belong there.

Participation where one feels used

Mauro Striano, FEANTSA ¹⁰ : Sometimes, decision-makers give people the opportunity to participate but then they don't really take into account what people say if they're not from the same class in terms of culture and education. Those who live in poverty do not feel as if there is any effective follow-up to what they say during meetings.



Fourth World People's University "Voting rights and local elections". Belgium.

Being a citizen means being able to vote with full awareness of the facts

Maryannick Renaudier (Centre-Loire, France): A lot of people in my neighbourhood say: "We're not allowed to vote." I ask them why, because everyone has the right to vote. "I know, but nobody ever asks for our opinion, they tell us that we're worth nothing." "And why should we vote?" I told them that they could give their opinion if they went along and voted. "To do or to say

what?" To fight against poverty for example. You are citizens like everyone else. They've been told so often that they're worth nothing at all. The political parties should come into the "poor" neighbourhoods.

Angèle Pens (Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium): We're forced to vote. But people with responsibilities also have a duty to stick to their commitments.

Being a citizen, means being associated with decisions that concern us

My career path was decided for me

Delegation from Switzerland: I was asked what I wanted to do later, what interested me. Whatever I said, I was told no, on the pretext that I hadn't been in a class that was academic enough. I had in fact been in a special class, not because I was stupid, but because I have a disability - I'm hearing impaired. Because I was in a special class, I was considered to be useless and incapable of working. A decision was taken in my place. That's why I've started an apprenticeship working in a centre for disabled people, when that wasn't what I wanted to do with my life.

How can you feel like a citizen when you've been separated from your parents, your brothers and sisters, without having been involved in these decisions?

Laura Mason (United Kingdom): Some of my children were placed in foster homes. When the case came to the family court, my children weren't given an opportunity to speak. My dad looks after one of my children. Although he has been a pillar of support to me, I can only meet him and my child twice a year because of a decision by the family court that recognises him as the adoptive father. And as far as the other children are concerned, they've been separated and they don't see each other. And my two daughters who live with me can't meet their grandfather. My family has been totally destroyed. My children want to come home to me but they're not allowed to come home, and they don't even let them see each other. And maybe when they're 16, or 18, perhaps they may not want to be involved in society because they've never been allowed to be involved in society. I'd like it if in the United Kingdom, if a child is adopted, he or she is still allowed to keep a link with his or her birth parents and brothers and sisters.

10-FEANTSA: Fédération Européenne des Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless)

Being a citizen means having a recognised place in society

When I was laid off I felt as though I was a second-class citizen

Elzbieta Darkowska (Poland): It seems to me that as long as you're someone who's active, who earns enough to live off, you're in some way respected by the authorities, you pay your taxes, you do your duty. The problem arises when you lose your job. Often, social workers consider us to be problem people who extort benefits and who live off the state. Here's an example: I started working at 15 and I've been working for 34 years. I was laid off this year. I get state unemployment benefits for 6 months and after that, there are no job opportunities but I still have 12 years to go before I reach retirement age. No one's interested in knowing how I'm going to survive for 12 years without any income. I now feel as though I'm a second class citizen. People don't respect me in the same way as they did when I was earning money. You can say that they've taken away my dignity and my dreams.

Monique Couillard (Belgium): Work is not the only thing that we contribute to society. It's important but it's not the only thing. How can we recognise the contribution of each individual which can be different from one person to the next, the value of each individual?

Being a citizen means getting involved as a group in a project for change

By getting involved in our neighbourhood, we made our voice heard.

Irish delegation: We're members of an after-school group, in a housing complex that belongs to the local authorities. This complex was built

in the early 1950s. Around 10 years ago, the municipal council told us that they would be renovating the building, but nothing happened and living conditions became more and more difficult. For example, some of us haven't had hot water for months and the roofs leak. The whole neighbourhood has been neglected. The residents got together for the first time in late 2008 to put pressure on the authorities with regard to maintaining the play area at the bottom of the building and keeping it open. With the help of the social worker, around 20 families joined together in the play area. We invited public representatives to join us as well as representatives of the police force and the municipal council, and they came. That's when we realised that many of them shared our



Children from the Dorset Street group, in Dublin, Ireland.

ideas and so we laid the foundations for a support group for parents. Of course, as a group, we continue to fight to keep what we're entitled to. We decided to create an after-school club for children. We managed to get subsidies and this encouraged us to go back to school so that we could learn how better to help the children. It was a social worker who gave us strength and encouragement. Yesterday she told me that it was important for a social worker never to judge people. Also, she said that as a professional, she should never place her values above those of the people she's working with. This is what she's learnt from working with these people. What we needed was a little incentive from outside, a gentle push forward. That's what got us going.

Liliane Maillet (Champagne-Ardenne, France): You have to get out and approach people. Our neighbourhood residents' organisation spends a great deal of time on the streets. You can't just sit in a nice clean office and expect to prepare the future together.



An activist from Ireland showing photographs of her neighbourhood. Brussels, 4 March 2012.

Delegation from Nord-Pas-de-Calais (France): Everyone's entitled to have the initiative and invite others to attend, for example, a neighbourhood party or a summer festival, by going to the most isolated in order to seek their opinion.

Participating, means being able to get training and to be recognised as a co-trainer, a co-researcher

By attending a social workers training course, I contributed to the community.

Amanda Button (United Kingdom): I attended a training course at university. The aim of the training course was to share experiences between trainers and the people being trained. One of the main purposes was to deal with situations in which children were removed from their families. We try to get the social workers to think before they take this decision. We try to convince them not to judge people, even if they've read their files beforehand. This training helps social workers to understand how important it is that they meet the families, that they listen to them, and that they avoid prejudging them. My involvement in this training course really encouraged me and gave me a feeling of being useful. Not only am I able to express myself, but I can talk on behalf of those who don't have the strength to express themselves individually.

During our action research, we speak on behalf of families.

Vincent Godefroid (Belgium): In general, when we conduct research into people living in poverty, we interview the professionals who work with them. We talk to a few people who are living in poverty. The researchers choose the information that they want to include, and make their analyses on the basis of what they've understood.

In Belgium, Aide à la Jeunesse (AJ) asked for research to be done into the transmission of files to the families concerned, by AJ.

I'm part of a group of people involved in this research project. We, members of ATD Fourth World, go out and meet people who are experiencing what we've experienced. We ask ourselves questions. We check to see that what's being said to AJ is indeed what they want to say. We need to be sure that these words are their words and not ours.

This is when we see that families want access to

their files so that they can prepare for the meeting, so that they know what's being held against them and so that they are better able to defend themselves.

We have knowledge to share

Pascale Anglade (Rhône-Alpes, France): I firmly believe in joint-training sessions where professionals and Fourth World activists work together as joint trainers. For example, in a joint-training session with a healthcare worker, an activist, who had once been homeless, explained how difficult it was and how much energy was needed to go to a hospital and face a healthcare professional of whom he was afraid. And it was a discovery for the Fourth World activists to learn that healthcare professionals were afraid of meeting the underprivileged. Discovering this mutual fear helps to change things.

Emmanuel Vandericken (Flanders, Belgium): This training doesn't only apply to professionals who meet people living in poverty. This sort of training is also necessary for those who spend all day behind a desk, such as European bureaucrats. We carried out a joint-training session with a group of young architects. Architects never meet families living in extreme poverty, but it was important to raise their awareness of the fact that what they construct will have huge consequences on the lives of people. This is work that has to be done together over several days.

In order for this sort of training to be successful, what we have to contribute must be recognised as being of equal value as what the professionals have to contribute.



Reading a text on citizenship. Brussels, 5 March 2012.

11 - People with experience of poverty, acting on their own behalf and on behalf of others.

An “Agora” to evaluate Aide à la Jeunesse (Youth support)

In Belgium, organisations have asked for a study and evaluation to be carried out on the decree concerning Aide à la Jeunesse, given the many cases of children being placed in foster care and the problems encountered in maintaining family links.

An initiative involving dialogue and consultation, called “Agora” has been underway since 1998 within the French community of Belgium. It includes civil servants from AJ and activists from two organisations that work with very poor families – Luttes Solidarités Travail (LST) and ATD Fourth World. This consultation is a long-term project. Each party contributes something to the other. People living in poverty are no longer seen only as people who need to be helped, but also as people who have knowledge and an opinion to contribute.

Citizenship: PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE...

... TO CONCLUDE

Egbert Holthuis : I think that now we’ve started to make our presence felt, to respect each other, it’s a good start. We should begin at a local level. Any form of local beginning can be used at a European level. Ideas should be reflected in a budget. If not, it’s very difficult to value them.

Anne Degrand-Guillaud : In order to participate in public life, or even in a workshop like today, you first have to have confidence in yourself. You have to be recognised as an equal, at the same level as the experts. When you say something, you share your knowledge which enables you to be recognised. We also have to ensure that those who are listening have understood. This takes time.

Before the workshop, you said something wonderful: “You are a part of the solution.” It’s not the managers who are going to find the solution for you, but together, this decision will be taken. The right solution is the solution that we find together.

Judy McKnight : From a very young age, it is important that everybody gets the chance to be heard. We need to involve young people, get them to participate and it’s thanks to this active participation that we become active citizens, that’s how we get involved in political life and that’s how we vote. ATD Fourth World plays an essential role and this experience should be continued by getting more people living in poverty involved, so that they make their voices heard more and get to play a role in society. And this work could present an opportunity to make ourselves heard at a European level, in particular at the European Parliament. We need to work together to intensify our action.

Suggestions for the meaningful participation of all

For the meaningful participation of all, the structures, the groups and the institutions must first think about the conditions that need to be implemented in order to make it possible..

- **From a very early age, children should experiment with citizenship** (living together, fundamental rights, participation) at school and in other areas where children and young people live; it's important that everybody, without overlooking the most isolated people, should have the occasion to be heard, to be called upon, to build and to participate in projects that will lead to change, and for this they need to have teachers who have been trained and who are attentive.
- Social workers and organisations should be enabled to **support the collective projects of the population** in a neighbourhood, to be close to the most isolated in order to start out from their aspirations.
- **The family should be supported so that it doesn't break down** and if it's really necessary to take the children into care, **the links between parents and children and brothers and sisters must be kept in tact.**

- **Raise awareness among the general public about the reality of taking children into care and of its consequences.** If experts weren't driven by public opinion, perhaps they wouldn't do the same thing. It is important that people stand up against taking children into care on the grounds of poverty and say: "We must act differently."

We need to envisage working, in an appropriate institution, on the "combining knowledge" in the form of training, research projects, exchange seminars investigatory visits to the places concerned, where the experience of each individual – the people living in poverty and the professionals – can be confronted and involved, in order to understand the motivations of the actors, the ins and outs the policies of taking children into care, with a view to destroying prejudices that people have against others.

What are the consequences of these policies on the feelings of citizenship for these children?

- Regulations within the European Union are adopted without anyone knowing exactly what the consequences will be for the very poorest members of society. We suggest that the European Commission, by applying the "horizontal social clause" of the treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (article 9), should decide to integrate **in the impact studies of its proposals "demands linked to the fight against social exclusion"**, by consulting organisations that are particularly well qualified to talk to people living in poverty who are confronted social exclusion in the regulations of the European Union.



CLOSING SPEECHES

Social and fundamental rights should be placed at the same level as economic freedoms and issues linked to economic governance

LEILA KURKI,
President of the section
“Employment, Social
Affairs, Citizenship”,
European Economic and
Social Committee



I'm very happy to have been able to participate in this conference where I have listened and learnt from your experiences. As a member of the Committee, I'm used to working on documents and with people in the commissions. Meeting you has thus enriched my thinking on these subjects.

This theme of active citizenship, fundamental rights and poverty is very closely linked to the work of the European Economic and Social Committee. We have adopted several opinions concerning the different aspects of these issues.

Europe should adopt a pact for social investment

The situation in Europe is bad, and it's got worse over recent years, even though our target under Strategy 2020 is to reduce poverty. I believe that there is a real lack of political will to act.

Austerity measures have restricted social services and reduced the amount of benefits paid. These are not the measures that will enable Europe to get out of this crisis situation. On the contrary, they will only serve to impoverish citizens, we're convinced of it.

We've just adopted an opinion concerning the consequences of economic governance and its impact on social situations. We state in this opinion that we are very concerned by this situation and by the manner it is being dealt with in the European decision-making process. We have recommended that Europe should adopt a pact for social investment and we are convinced that this should happen. We are working towards achieving this objective.

Listening to your examples of what's really happening

There are a lot of political representatives who, if they heard your examples, would get a good idea of what's really happening to people at a local level. It is important to underline the fact that the Lisbon Treaty insists on the principle of solidarity and on the role of the European Union to support and act as a complement to the action of Member States in the fight against poverty. We have examples of fundamental social rights which are breached on a daily basis. It should be considered that these rights must be given the same importance as issues related to economic governance.

Policies relating to the labour market and social policies can be a positive force if they are well designed. They encourage social justice and make it possible to improve economic performances. It is my opinion that decision-makers are not fully aware of this.

Combating poverty involves the dignity of all

At the EESC, we are convinced that we need to target the action of the structural funds so that they make it possible to fight against poverty, or at least they make it possible to do more than what is being done now. We believe that 20% of the structural funds' resources should be reserved for social inclusion and the fight against poverty, with a focus on citizens who are the most distant from the labour market.

We believe that the open method of co-ordination should be strengthened and should include national strategies for social protection and social inclusion.

We need to keep in mind that promoting fundamental rights and reaching out specifically to the most vulnerable groups are legally binding obligations for all of the European Institutions and Agencies.

I've come away with a lot of good ideas: the fight against poverty must be focused on dignity; I think that's what lies at the heart of the issue.

Your work is irreplaceable for regaining confidence and obtaining results

**ISABELLE DURANT,
Vice President of the
European Parliament**



The work you're doing together, with people from different European countries, is irreplaceable.

Because as you said yourselves, that's also what gives people back their self-confidence, what puts them on their feet when they no longer dare to stand upright. This work is indispensable, even though it may not lead to immediate political results in terms of policies.

Training administrative players

You have rightly said that we need to train the administrative players. This is true. A lot of people in this Parliament or at the European Commission speak in a language that isn't easy. Their ideas are very theoretical. It is thus very important that we, MEPs, listen to you, because you represent others.

At a European level, there are some who defend the idea that the state authorities cannot put money into the creation of low-cost housing, because we have to let the market run its course. It's a real issue here, at the European Parliament, to say: "No, there are housing projects into which governments should put money to make them less expensive." Because if they don't, a whole series of people will never have access to housing and they will be victims of unscrupulous landlords and of all of those who let poor quality housing at exorbitant rents. I believe that we have a real responsibility to you, even though it is not the same responsibility as your local MPs.

The European Union and the Member States shouldn't keep passing the buck

We should all act, at a local level, with people who are close to us, at a country level and at a European level. We have to change the situation in order to improve it. We have to make an effort to meet each other.

Knowing how to listen to those who are experiencing difficulty, in order to make just laws

I think that the European authorities should know how to listen and allow people to say what they expect from the European Union in terms of their immediate demands.

Europe is not a theoretical concept, it is very concrete. We should listen to all European citizens, especially those who don't feel as though they count, while they do. I believe that this capacity to listen is essential for making laws which sometimes have an impact on reality after several years. It is also important, to have feedback from groups like yours on the undesirable effects of what doesn't work at all in reality.

Some laws work in certain countries but not in others, for certain people, but not for all, or they create a solution for some but a problem for others. So, it's important to have feedback from people in order to correct European laws, but also to correct the manner in which the state authorities react at the level of the commune, the youth council, or any other body. It's a slow process. It's difficult, it takes a long time and results aren't immediate, but this time is necessary, both for us and for you.

More Europe, yes, but what sort of Europe?

EUGEN BRAND,
Director General,
International
Movement
ATD Fourth World



We're experiencing a crisis that goes a lot deeper than a financial crisis. What we're experiencing is a knowledge crisis. Because we are unable to say what the consequences are today in Europe, on the lives of millions of people, of the economic and financial crises and of the policies that we're putting in place. This is why we're asking the Commission to draw up a report on these issues. This report should not be drawn up by experts alone, but based on a real cross-fertilization of knowledge, with the input of all.

What are the "golden rules"?

On 30 January 2012, the governments of the European Union, adopted, here in Brussels, a new budgetary pact, the "golden rules" to be applied by each Member State, in order to be able to better measure economic growth and budgetary balance in each country. In this same Europe, in 2000, the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission solemnly adopted the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The first clause of this charter states: "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected."

At the dawn of the European Year of Citizens, which ATD Fourth World supports, what are the golden rules for citizenship that will really serve the needs of the first clause of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union? How do we measure growth, not in economic terms, but in terms of growth of European citizenship that shows solidarity, that acts for access to fundamental rights for all, the participation of all, living together with our differences and for a real representation of people living in poverty.

We are very keen for this issue to be worked through by the EESC in the form of an opinion concerning this European citizenship, for which together we have political and ethical ambition.

Guaranteeing fundamental rights at a European level

Among the five key objectives of the "Europe 2020" Strategy¹² of the European Union, there is the objective of reducing the number of people threatened by poverty by 20 million. But what will happen to the other 60 million?

The Parliamentary Intergroup "Extreme Poverty and Human Rights" is highly involved within the European Parliament. We'd like to see the European Parliament mobilise in order to avoid a 2-speed Europe for Human Rights, a Europe which, in order to cope with the economic and financial crisis, sacrifices its weakest citizens. A guarantee of rights at a European level is indispensable. The application of principles will then fall to local and national authorities. In order to achieve this, the European Union and all of its Member States will have to ratify the European Social Charter¹³, including articles 30 and 31.

Europe and the Millennium Development Goals

The United Nations is also on board, with the evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG)¹⁴: what is going to happen beyond 2015? The ATD Fourth World Movement solemnly requests the international community not to submit proposals too quickly, but to think about them with all of those who are excluded from the evaluation of the MDGs.

12- See <http://www.atd-quartmonde.org/ATD-Quart-Monde-reagit-a-la.html>

13- Convention of the Council of Europe (much wider than the European Union) signed in 1961 and revised in 1996, which sets out the rights and freedoms of citizens. A system for collective complaints has been put in place. Articles 30 and 31 concern the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion and the right to housing.

14- In order to free our fellow men, women and children from poverty, the United Nations set 8 goals in 2000 with the aim of achieving them by 2015.

Joseph Wresinski showed that severe poverty is not a sectorial issue among others, but that it calls into question the fundamental tenets of our society – equal dignity of all and access of all to rights, solidarity, fraternity, a sense of purpose and the sharing of wealth produced, the effectiveness of social justice and the application of human rights. It is for this policy that people living in severe poverty wish to be citizens in their own right.

It is at the level of this policy that the European Union could take a leading position in the world, by starting to refuse to accept that the poor people living in its member states be set aside. It is at this level that the influence and the legitimacy of Europe will be manifest, rather than at a financial level. Because this is where the poorest people in the world are waiting for Europe. It is also by creating this way forward that the European Union will pursue the goals of its founders – peace among people and among peoples.



Fourth World People's University, EESC, Brussels, 5 March 2012.



Fourth World People's University, EESC, Brussels, 5 March 2012.

CONCLUSION

Need for the commitment of all in the fight against poverty, by working at all levels with the poorest members of society



The European Economic and Social Committee Brussels, Belgium.

On 5 March 2012, during the course of the European Fourth World People's University, our goal was to take up the challenge of creating a dialogue between two worlds which don't usually meet and which don't usually understand each other: people living in poverty and social exclusion, activists from organisations and professionals working alongside them, and European leaders.

Dare to stand up straight

Mireille Vlassenbroeck (Belgium)

"This was the first time that I attended a European Fourth World People's University and it was a very good experience. I learnt a lot about other countries, about poverty, and the problems that we have. In all countries, we have to fight for people's rights and for their dignity. Now I'm going to talk to other people, so that together we can speak out, loud and clear, and so that we can go to Parliament and tell them what they have to do."

Listen and hear, to better understand the situation of extreme poverty

Isabelle Durant, Vice President of the European Parliament

"A lot of people in the European Parliament or at the European Commission have forgotten what real life is all about.

That's why it's very important to listen to you. We should all act, at a local level, with people who are close to us, at a country level and at a European level. We have to work towards changing the situation so that it improves and so that you are considered as people in their own right, as citizens of the European Union. It is in this capacity that you should be heard. You can help the state authorities to understand you. We have to make an effort to meet each other. We need to make laws and listen to people living poverty."

Sharing knowledge

Gérard de Jong (Netherlands)

"Often, people living in working class neighbourhoods have learnt hard lessons from life, as a result of their difficult experiences and because they have been confronted with the unacceptable. This knowledge that they've acquired could be used in the fight for access to rights for all."

Eugen Brand, Director General, International Movement ATD Fourth World

"The people here are activists from the Fourth World People's Universities, organisations, or members of European Institutions.

What brings us together and what motivates us is the aim of learning together, from each other, about citizenship that is capable of building a Europe of human rights, of democracy and of peace."



Delegations visiting the Parliamentarium. Brussels, 4 March 2012.

Fighting extreme poverty in Europe and in the world is a question of dignity for all Europeans

The participants in the European Fourth World People's University denounced the way in which poverty across Europe is trivialised, and the way politicians often pass the buck from one level of power to another.

At the local, national and European level, they asked:

- That everyone's dignity be respected and that the fight against all forms of discrimination be reinforced.
- That from an early age, children experience solidarity and citizenship at school and in other areas of life.
- That adults and young people, including the most excluded, have a place in consultations at all levels of decision-making and that they be recognised as stake-holders.
- That authorities strengthen information on rights for all European citizens.
- That social legislation take into account the mobility of people living in poverty who move to improve their living conditions.
- That a European citizens' initiative be launched on minimum incomes in all member states.



To strengthen participative democracy, all European institutions should encourage the sustainable creation of spaces where different forms of knowledge can be merged, within the European Union.

- In order that people living in poverty can exercise their citizenship, their rights and their responsibilities. It is crucial for them and it is crucial for the democratic institutions. But their citizenship cannot truly exist if other members of society don't want to be their fellow citizens.
- Rebuilding trust between all citizens means creating the conditions for them to learn from one another, in particular in order for the poorest to be convinced that their experience of life has given them a unique form of knowledge that they can share.
- At the level of countries and Europe, institutions must support civic and professional training that nurtures social bonds and creates dialogue between the most disadvantaged Europeans and decision-makers, as the European Economic and Social Committee does by hosting the European Fourth World People's Universities on a regular basis since 1989.



The participants asked **of the European institutions:**

- The European Economic and Social Committee should draft an Opinion, working with the people who are the most concerned, on what "European citizenship" should be, based on a rejection of poverty and effective access to human rights.
- The European Commission should analyse the effects of new policies which are implemented in the name of economic governance on the most disadvantaged people, by involving them in this study and combining their different forms of knowledge.
- Fundamental and social rights should be given equal consideration as the demands of economic governance, and at least 20% of the European Social Fund should be dedicated to the fight against poverty and social exclusion.
- The European Parliament should put pressure on all of the Member States to sign the revised European Social Charter, and the European Union should sign it itself and allow the collective complaints procedure.

All these initiatives and proposals will be published for 17th October, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, and in 2013, European Year for Citizenship. They will also serve to raise public awareness across Europe before the European elections in 2014.

APPENDICES

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- Maison de quartier Stuivenberg, Anvers (Belgium),
- Family Movement (Belgium),
- Dorset St after-school group (Ireland),
- Association EUTOPIA (Italy),
- Caritas (Italy),
- FNV Trade Union (Netherlands),
- Association of French Abroad (Netherlands),
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- Dominique VISÉ

Themes of the sessions of the European Fourth World People's Universities since 1989		
2010	Brussels	"With the young, let's build a Europe without poverty or exclusion" with the support of the EESC
2009	Pierrelaye (FR)	"Who and what does a child need to grow?"
2008	Marseille (FR)	"Active Inclusion" within the framework of the 7th European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion.
2004	Warsaw	"Acting together for one Europe and dignity for all". in collaboration with the Mediator for Citizen's Rights in Poland, the EESC and the University of Warsaw
2001	Brussels	"Parents, partners of their children's futures: a goal for Europe" with the support of the EESC
1999	Brussels	"We're all stakeholders of human rights" with the support of the EESC
1997	Brussels	"All hands are needed to build the earth" with the support of the EESC
1995	Brussels	"Culture and human activity in the rejection of poverty" with the support of the EESC
1993	Brussels	"Rejecting poverty: a new citizenship" with the support of the EESC
1991	Brussels	"The very poorest citizens, partners in the construction of Europe" with the support of the EESC
1989	Brussels	"Minimum Guaranteed Income" with the support of the EESC

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- ***Le croisement des savoirs et des pratiques*** ; Research Groups Fourth World-University and Fourth World Partner, Editions de l'Atelier / Editions Quart Monde, Paris, 2008 – 704 pages.
- ***Report on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion***, adopted by the European Parliament on 24 octobre 2011, reporter: Frédéric Daerden (available in all of the languages of the EU) See Rapports du Parlement européen.
- The film ***Citoyens Universités populaires Quart Monde*** directed by Delphine Duquesne, (26 mn), takes a look at the history of the European Fourth World People's University.
- ATD Fourth World web site <http://www.atd-quartmonde.org/Une-citoyennete-qui-refuse-la.html> and EESC web site: 12ème Université Populaire Quart Monde européenne | Comité économique et social européen
- This Fourth World Peoples University was evaluated by Geneviève Defraigne Tardieu, Doctor of Educational Sciences and by Ides Nicaise, Professor, Catholic University of Louvain (Flanders, Belgium). The evaluation will be available on the site www.atd-quartmonde.org in February 2013

12th European Fourth World People's University

Citizens United for a Europe Active against Persistent Poverty

5 March 2012

In the context of a major economic and financial crisis, the poorest people are increasingly being ignored, stigmatised and harassed by the authorities in Europe. Europe will not be built as a Europe of human rights, of democracy and of peace, if the poorest citizens are not a part of the process.

On 5 March 2012, 120 representatives from 10 countries demonstrated their mobilisation for human dignity and the rights of citizens. They dialogued with European leaders. "We, Members of the European Parliament, should listen to you and make laws that take into account what you have said", stated **Isabelle Durant**, Vice President of the European Parliament.

EXCERPTS

"Active citizenship is an undertaking in terms of European values.

Being an active citizen means calling into question the established systems and structures that form an obstacle to compliance with European and pluralistic values. Sometimes poverty means that people are deprived of their fundamental right of political participation."

Staffan Nilsson, President
European Economic and Social Committee

"I want to talk to you about citizenship.

*It's a difficult word,
because when you're living on the street, in the eyes of other people,
you really don't count."*

Patrick Weinmann (Rhône-Alpes, France)



September 2012
© Fourth World Publications

ISBN 978-2-913046-97-9
8 euros