

European Fourth World People's University 2016

Towards a Europe that leaves no one behind

After the financial crisis, the lack of solidarity with refugees, and the Brexit, Europe is doing some soul searching. Will a more social Europe, as expected by the citizens who live in poverty and exclusion, emerge? Because Europe must also be their Europe!

To help build a bridge between the institutions where Europe is thought and built, and people living in poverty in member countries, since 1989, ATD Fourth World organizes every two years the European Fourth World People's University.

The next European Fourth World People's University is already scheduled. The dialogue process will begin in November, and **the plenary session will be held on December 20, 2016 at the European Economic and Social Committee.**

The topics to be addressed

After the European Fourth World People's University held on March 5, 2014 at the European Parliament, ATD Fourth World produced 14 proposals to think and build together a Europe without poverty and exclusion.¹

In consensus with the ATD Fourth World groups in Belgium, Spain, France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and The United Kingdom, we have planned for the European Fourth World People's University 2016 further work on two of these proposals:

- **The guarantee to the right to legal existence on the territory;**
- **The guarantee to the right to the means required to live a decent life.**

In the appendix you will find a description of these topics.

The goal is to facilitate the dialogue between people experiencing poverty and other citizens and political actors on these two topics, in order to enrich the analysis of reality and refine the political proposals to come.

¹ <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/merging-knowledge-create-proposals-inclusive-europe/> and <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/13th-european-fourth-world-people/>

A process conceived to share knowledge

Our challenge is to enable all participants, despite their diversity, their different points of view, to make contributions that are understood and taken into consideration to produce analysis and proposals as a result of a knowledge-sharing process among them all.

Our last goal is to formulate proposals that are conceived **with** the contribution of people living in persistent poverty and **not just for** them.

To make this knowledge-sharing possible, we count on a several stages preparation process.

A back and forth will be organized between **three peer groups**, each bearing specific knowledge:

- People living in poverty. They bring knowledge of first-hand experiences of reality and the impact of political measures; they also propose ideas to improve their situation;
- People currently working or having worked in European institutions, on policy development, global analysis and statistics of reality. They bring knowledge of governance and public administration, legislation, political maneuvering margins, and statistical data;
- People involved in fieldwork with people in poverty, NGO players. They bring knowledge from actions carried out to address the different issues.

Ideally, the three groups work sometimes separately, sometimes together to enable the confrontation of contributions followed by work on the differences.

Appendix - Description of the topics

Topic A: the guarantee to the right to legal existence on the territory

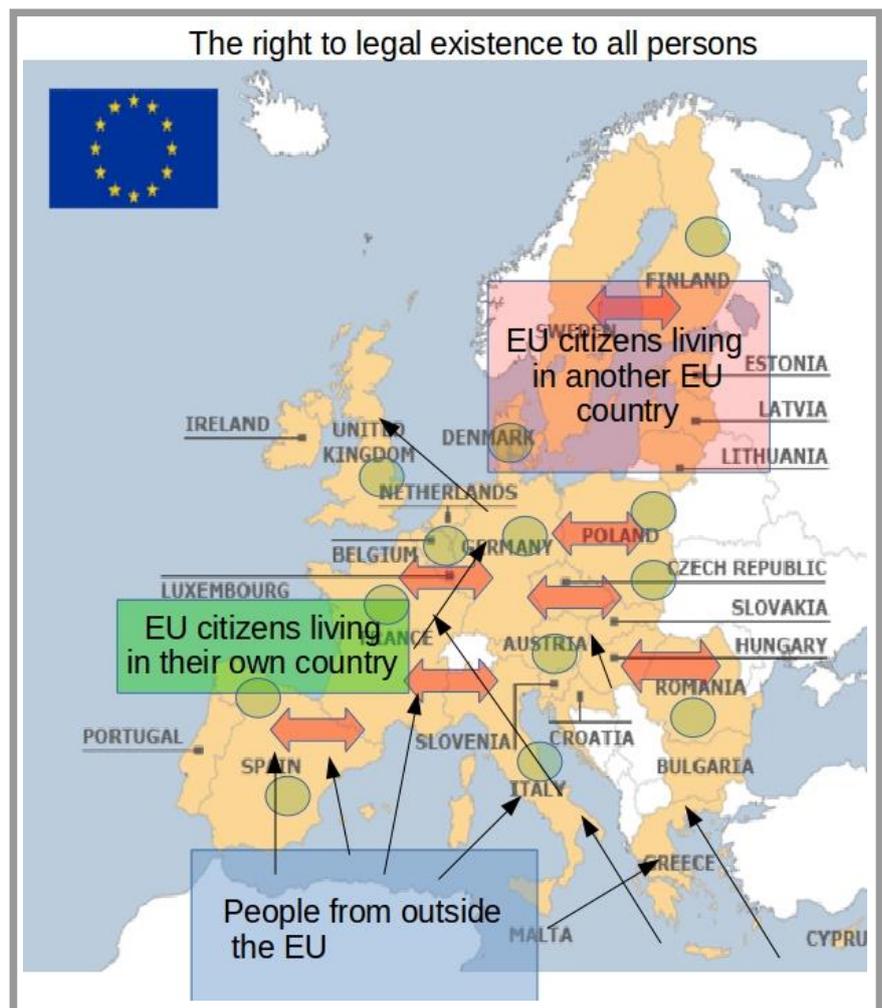
The proposal that resulted from the European Fourth World People's University 2014:

We call upon the European Union to guarantee the right to legal existence to all persons living on its territory.

The aim is to take this proposal as a starting point, to refine it by taking into account the whole range of situations of people who are lacking a legal status or basic documents that would allow them to have access to their fundamental rights. We also seek for the best practices to improve the current legislation and its implementation.

The right to exist without proper papers?

Many people in Europe do not enjoy recognition of their existence, even though this right is protected by article 16 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which affirms the right to recognition before the law. This means that these people are not able to access any rights (participation, work, healthcare, housing, the right to vote...). They are not taken into account in statistics. This is the case for many migrants, Roma and asylum seekers, but also for those who do not have housing, who live in camps or on the streets and effectively occupy the position of illegal residents in their own country.



There is a variety of situations which are subject to different laws, treaties and directives (see diagram on a side), but those affected live in the same insecurity, often for years. That puts in question both, the criteria and the procedures for obtaining the legal status of residence, whether it is temporary or permanent. It also draws the attention to what services and rights should be provided to a person in the absence of any legal status.

"Living outside in the rain or without any official papers in a state of fear, it is the same thing really"

"Some people don't even have a right of legal existence because they are not registered anywhere, they are residing illegally in a given country or, even though they are European citizens, they have been de-registered in the place in which they are living"

Topic B: the guarantee to the right to the means required to live a decent life.

The proposal that resulted from the European Fourth World People's University 2014:

We call upon the European Union to establish a directive on the means required to live a decent life for each individual, which includes a decent minimum income in all of the member countries and which takes housing costs into account.

The aim is to take this proposal as a starting point, to refine it by taking into account what people in poverty think and live in each country in terms of income. Analysis coming from other sources and legal and political maneuvering margins are to be considered as well.

Why to guarantee a decent minimum income?

The current reality of those living in extreme poverty shows that fundamental rights are not guaranteed to everyone in Europe. Persistent lack of housing, work or income prevents people from assuming their family, social and professional responsibilities on a long term basis. If they try to access or maintain their rights, they are faced with often insurmountable conditions and complicated and lengthy procedures. Under these circumstances, their daily life is reduced to a constant effort to seek out a minimum degree of security and effective access to rights which, in theory at least, are recognized in law. Furthermore, social exclusion highly increases the risk of disintegration of the family unit.

In this respect, the guarantee of a minimum income is essential to secure fundamental rights. The possibility of accessing high quality public services at an affordable cost (social, education, health, housing, energy, water and internet) also plays an important role to live a decent life.

It is also increasingly recognized that rather generous minimum income schemes make the economy less vulnerable to shocks and, more generally, promote prosperity and well-being for all by reducing inequalities.

The state of minimum income schemes in the European Union:

There are minimum income schemes in all 28 European Union countries, except from Italy and Greece. They represent the last resort, and to request them, it is necessary to prove the lack of sufficient resources. Additionally, applicants have to fulfill requirements of age, place of residence, active job search, and the amounts awarded vary according to the household composition. The way these conditions are put in place is different from one country to another.

The amounts granted differ a lot among countries, even after cost-of-living correction is applied. With the exception of two countries (Denmark and Iceland), the amount is smaller than 50% of the median income.

From the point of view of beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries, eligibility conditions constitute a significant barrier to access, whether it is because of their nature or the required documentation. The initial and periodic checks become intrusive to people's private life. The amounts granted do not guarantee the means required to live a decent life, or in other words, the access to fundamental rights.

The non-take-up rates (non-access rate would be a more appropriate term) are problematic: they go from 20% to 75% depending on the country, and are far beyond fraud rates. This is the price to

pay due to high eligibility conditions. Effective access is also reduced by stigmatization and discrimination phenomena.

A similar but different concept: the basic income (or universal income)

The basic income approach has recently been under the spotlight in Europe. There is an experiment already going on in the Netherlands, and a pilot project to be implemented in Finland. In June, a referendum was held in Switzerland to decide whether to introduce such measure or not. However, a large majority rejected the project.

The basic income could overcome many drawbacks present in current minimum income schemes: it would be unconditional and individual, making intrusive control in household life redundant. Yet, many questions remain unresolved: the amount to be granted, to what extent it replaces, or not, other social welfare allowances, if it will create or destroy jobs, and what will be the impact on wages. Not to mention the funding challenges. For the time being initiatives are still modest and prudent, but it would be good to involve people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the debate.