



INTERGENERATIONAL PERSISTENCE OF POVERTY

“Poverty is not inevitable. Yet, although citizens on the whole are prepared to deplore extreme poverty, not so many of them truly want to pay the price for its destruction. Attitudes are largely steeped in the idea that over-promotion of equal opportunities would be too great a risk for the country, all for the sake of citizens who, it is believed, would not know how to make good use of such opportunities... the continued existence and reproduction of extreme poverty, that is to say, the existence of an underclass, is essentially due to the way our society treats people living in poverty, blaming them for overall insecurity and relegating them to dependence: only a major change which gives them back an active role can reverse this process.” Joseph Wresinski ¹

Since its origin at the end of the 1950s, the International Movement ATD Fourth World has repeatedly heard people living in extreme poverty express as their **greatest aspiration and struggle that their children not have the same life of poverty, but instead that they have a dignified future and are able to participate in and contribute fully to society.**

But in spite of their determination, their immense efforts, these population groups cannot alone remove the weight of poverty and negative stereotypes. Their isolation prevents their children from having the same means as others to develop their potential. They are locked in guilt for their misery and that of their children.

The term “transmission” can unfortunately carry the connotation that it is indeed the parents who are guilty of re-transmitting the poverty that they themselves inherited. The term “persistence of poverty,” on the other hand, implies many other levels of responsibility in addition to the efforts of parents. “To name things wrongly is to add to the misfortune of the world,” the author Albert Camus famously stated. ATD Fourth World mainly uses the term “persistence” when referring to extreme poverty.

As Ms. Bachelet stated lately on the impact of COVID-19, “People who have been **pushed behind, and rendered powerless, by generations of discrimination**, have systematically unequal access to services and opportunities – including in education, shelter, sanitation, access to employment and justice and participation in decisions that affect them. They are placed at a structural disadvantage when it comes to any threat.”²

¹ [“Curbing the Reproduction of Extreme Poverty”](https://www.joseph-wresinski.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/09/Enrayer_AC_mrb2.pdf), Report by Joseph Wresinski to Michel Rocard, Minister of Planning and Territorial Development, December 1982. https://www.joseph-wresinski.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/09/Enrayer_AC_mrb2.pdf

² [Statement by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 24 november 2020](#)

The importance of distinguishing between poverty and extreme poverty

It is important to distinguish between poverty and extreme poverty because, as recognized in the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in 2012:

Persons living in poverty have diverse experiences and needs and encounter different levels of poverty, in terms of both intensity and duration. While all such persons should be the focus of policies based on human rights, the Guiding Principles are concerned mainly with those experiencing the most severe poverty in a given context. Persons living in extreme poverty are of particular concern because their marginalization, exclusion and stigmatization often mean that they are not reached effectively by public policies and services. **Obstacles, insecurity and structural factors frequently render it impossible for them to claim their rights and to fulfil their potential independently;** they need active support from the State and other relevant stakeholders.³

The Guiding Principles conclude that “Persons experiencing extreme poverty live in a vicious cycle of powerlessness, stigmatization, discrimination, exclusion and material deprivation, which all mutually reinforce one another.”⁴ It is for this reason that extreme poverty persists, and from one generation to the next, people find themselves imprisoned in a situation that “not only ... is characterized by multiple reinforcing violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, but persons living in poverty generally experience regular denials of their dignity and equality.”⁵

In order to assist actors working at the community level to implement the Guiding Principles in working with people living in extreme poverty, a group of NGOs published a manual on how to help people to understand their situation from a human rights perspective and to break the vicious cycle in which they find themselves. The manual also puts forward suggestions as to actions that can be taken with local authorities and other sectors of society to ensure that their rights are respected and protected.⁶

Resistance, solidarity, and hopes of the poorest people

In 2012, an international research project entitled *Extreme poverty is violence; breaking the silence, searching for peace*⁷ underlined not only the violence that the deepest levels of poverty inflict on people, but also highlighted the unique and indispensable contribution that many of them make to building peace.

The experience of extreme poverty is **suffering, shame, silence, invisibility;** the violence it inflicts can in turn lead to violent reactions, but in the middle of the worst crises the majority of people in extreme poverty maintain **resistance, solidarity, and an inextinguishable hope** to go beyond the immediate, to think about the future and take initiatives against all odds. And it is these values, this strength that is the legacy of families to the next generations: the strength of

3 [OHCHR, Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights](#), page 4.

4 [Ibid.](#), p. 2.

5 [Ibid.](#)

6 https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/05/2015-09-01-GuidingPrinplsEPHR-HANDBOOK-EN-ATD_FI_Handbook_English_WEB-1.pdf

7 <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/07/ATD-Rompre-Anglais2.pdf>

family ties, expressions of their dignity, solidarity, resilience, the will to leave no one behind in order to move forward.

The migrants who send a good part of their wages to the family back home make an important contribution to a country's GDP. It is the largest source of external financing in many low- and middle-income countries.⁸ For the family, this hard-earned money is a secure resource that helps them to live and make plans.

This solidarity can lead to difficult choices when it comes to a child's education. For the millions of people in developing countries who have no social protection, and who work in the informal sector, parents need the contribution of their children to the family income from an early age, before or after school, and during the holidays. The fact that the child carries adult concerns from a very young age is detrimental to their studies, yet they often have a greater motivation to learn because they and their parents are well aware that success at school can change their lives and those of their families.

Moreover, children and their families do not always have the strength to push for many years of education. The family is exhausted by their efforts to survive, hence the short schooling. Children may not be able to go beyond learning to read and write and accept this to enable their little brothers and sisters to go to school in their turn. As UNESCO points out, education contributes greatly to reducing poverty, but the fact is that poverty blocks the way to fully enjoy the right to education.⁹

"Today, as in the past, **a poor child has no childhood**, responsibilities come to him as soon as he can stand on his own two feet."¹⁰ The value of the solidarity inherited by many poor children is very rarely perceived and therefore largely denied. People from outside disadvantaged communities, seeing only the reality of material deprivation, tend not to consider or treat the people who live there as human. As concluded in the study on *Extreme poverty is violence*, "Material deprivation reduces people to mere survival; insecurity causes families to break up; exploitation robs people of their potential; humiliation, exclusion and contempt reach a point at which people living in extreme poverty are not recognized as human beings."¹¹

Institutional and social mistreatment

*"Poverty is being treated like cattle, you have no dignity and no identity."*¹² A man living in extreme poverty in the United Kingdom.

The research study *Extreme Poverty is violence; breaking the silence, searching for peace* also highlighted the institutional and societal mistreatment of people living in extreme poverty, that is the

8 World Bank, [Money sent home by workers now largest source of external financing in low- and middle-income countries](#).

9 UNESCO, [Reducing global poverty through universal primary and secondary education](#). The report points out: "Increasing the years of schooling among adults (15 years old and over) by two years would help to lift nearly 60 million people out of poverty. Achieving universal primary and secondary attainment in the adult population would help to lift more than 420 million out of poverty, thus reducing the number of poor worldwide by more than half."

10 « Les Pauvres sont l'Eglise », entretiens du père Joseph Wresinski avec Gilles Anouil, Le Centurion, 1983

11 <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/07/ATD-Rompre-Anglais2.pdf>

12 ATD Fourth World United Kingdom, 2018, ['Understanding Poverty in All its Forms' Research Project](#): Interim report for the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

result of ignorance, denial or the deliberate will to exclude.

In 2019, the international participatory research *The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty*¹³ conducted jointly by ATD Fourth World and Oxford University in six countries (Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States) identified **institutional and social mistreatment as two of the nine dimensions of poverty**.

Institutional mistreatment is the failure of national or international institutions, through action or inaction, to respond appropriately and respectfully to the needs of people living in poverty, leading to their being ignored, humiliated or harmed. The inability of authorities to listen to people experiencing poverty, inequitable distribution of resources and services, lack of access to justice and persistent corruption are all aspects of institutional mistreatment.

Social mistreatment describes the way in which people experiencing poverty are negatively perceived and mistreated by other people and groups around them. In all countries, they are stigmatized and discriminated. As stated by Xavier Godinot, the ATD Fourth World Director of Research who coordinated the research project cited above:

Our societies treat their poorest members as they treat the planet. Natural resources are plundered and polluted often with impunity, in a dynamic of exploitation and profit, without those who plunder and pollute assuming their responsibilities. Similarly, poor populations have been exploited for generations and too often abandoned when their ability to work is exhausted.

But the way in which people in extreme poverty are treated is even more pernicious. Indeed, no one blames nature for its degradation, while all too often people living in poverty are accused of "not wanting to get out of it" and blamed for their situation.¹⁴

Unrecognized contributions to the formal economy, without social protection

In countries where families cannot rely on social welfare, children, youth and adults find activities in the informal sector to meet the needs of their families. These initiatives are often very ingenious, courageous and flexible. They represent **a contribution that is not valued but is rather heavily exploited by the formal economy sector**. These include the recycling of waste, the marketing of low-cost factory products - especially plastic - and the selling of basic necessities in small affordable units, such as drinking water in bags or SIM cards for cell phones.

Due to a life of deprivation, sometimes beginning in childhood, and physically demanding and/or dangerous work, workers in the informal sector are more often in poor health, exposed to epidemics and accidents. They are also exhausted prematurely and, due to a lack of means and training, cannot shift into activities that do not require physical strength. They cannot count on retirement and are forced to work until their bodies are worn out, which often happens prematurely. A man from the Democratic Republic of Congo said: "Every morning, I don't know if I'm going to make it through the day; my heart pounds. But I go. I know that even if I die in the street, collapsing under the weight of my load, I do it for my children. It is a sacred duty. I will die a hero. This is my life."

13 <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/international-advocacy/dimensions-of-poverty/>

14 Xavier Godinot, statement made at the Social Forum of the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva, October 2020.

The separation of parents from their children over generations

"Children cannot learn and cannot become adults if they don't know who they are, where they come from, if they can't be a little proud or even very proud of their roots." Joseph Wresinski

As recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the family constitutes "the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children."¹⁵ And yet in many families among the poorest people around the world, all too often parents are separated from their children because of poverty. **In developed countries, families are the most often separated as a result of institutional interventions**, whereas **in developing countries too often parents are faced with impossible choices**: seeing their children suffer from all the hardships of poverty or trying to give them another chance, however slim, to have a little more security.

This is why parents are led to place their children in centres such as orphanages, sometimes eventually even offering adoption. The latter constitutes a painful rupture, because in many cases, children and parents lose sight of each other for good.

In some cases, the parents entrust the child to another family member or a simple acquaintance, often with the expectation that a child living in a rural area will find better opportunities in the city. Unfortunately, a significant number of these children are exploited as domestic servants and cannot go to school or to evening classes after a tiring day and in minimal learning conditions.

Another alternative in Muslim countries is to place the child under the responsibility of a Master in a Koranic education home. Some children build a future there, while others find themselves obliged to beg for long hours without the option of a classical education.

In the cities, too many children are left to their own devices, and have a difficult history of violence, deprivation and misery. They are marked by what they have to face in the street: exploitation, dangers of all kinds, disease. This unprotected life of marginalization leads some of them to come into conflict with the law. They then can find themselves in prison, without any hope that their situation will be taken into account because they lack the means to be well defended in a fragile judicial system.

In addition, people who live in extreme poverty are exposed to many types of accidents and circumstances that can change the course of family life and separate parents and children: the death of a parent, illness, environmental disasters or social conflicts, armed conflicts that force them to flee, or the loss of some hard-won security.

In countries with child welfare systems, the **systems often question the ability of parents living in poverty to raise their children properly and so do not provide**

¹⁵ Preamble, Convention on the Rights of the Child, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

them with the necessary forms of support. Even more unfortunately, alternative care arrangements too often fail to offer children from poor families the conditions they need to thrive. When they come of age, they leave their foster families or institutions and plunge back into poverty.

It is for this reason that the Convention on the Rights of the Child envisions separation as the last option after all other possible actions have been taken to support parents in their responsibilities. For it recognizes that children, “for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.”¹⁶

And yet in Europe¹⁷ in several countries, **for generations, children and their parents were separated because of their level of poverty**, in contempt of all rights, and often with great violence and impunity. In Switzerland, for example, coercive measures in the name of assistance were widespread until the 1980s. According to estimates, 20,000 to 40,000 men and women were interned by administrative decision between 1930 and 1981. The coercive measures included family break-ups, placement of children in foster families or homes, the "re-education" of adolescents and adults in work camps and prisons, adoptions, sterilizations, castrations, and the testing of new drugs without consent.¹⁸

In recent years, in countries such as the United Kingdom¹⁹, **the number of children separated from their parents has increased.**

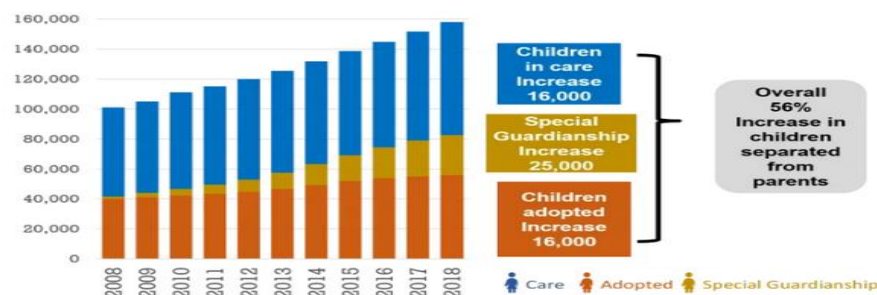


Image source: Bilson, A., & Munro, E. H. (2019). Adoption and child protection trends for children aged under five in England: Increasing investigations and hidden separation of children from their parents. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 96, 204-211.

There are cases where there is no other solution than placement of a child in alternative care. However, all too often alternative care is thought to be the best option for providing children a better future in spite of the evidence to the contrary. For even though such interventions may be necessary in the short term, separation has negative effects in the long term: beyond the violence of institutionalization itself, **living in institutions or in foster families does not guarantee for most children a better**

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/children-separated-from-their-parents-a-conspiracy-of-silence-and-violence/>

¹⁸ [LA MÉCANIQUE DE L'ARBITRAIRE INTERNEMENTS ADMINISTRATIFS EN SUISSE 1930-1981 RAPPORT FINAL](#). ATD Quart Monde a participé aux dialogues organisés par la CIE et il a écrit une contribution collective pour ce rapport publié en septembre 2019.

¹⁹ <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/children-separated-from-their-parents-a-conspiracy-of-silence-and-violence/>

future and long-term attachment ties.

In Quebec, a study conducted by the National School of Public Administration on 2,500 young people in institutions showed that during their stay in institutions or host families, one young person in six underwent 10 or more displacements. And that at the age of 17, fewer than 1 in 5 (17%) of youth placed by social services had reached the educational level corresponding to their age, compared to 75% of all youth of that age.²⁰ Likewise, in Europe, institutionalized children are more likely than non-institutionalized youth to have poorer educational qualifications and to have left school by the age of 16, to be young parents, to be homeless and unemployed, and to demonstrate criminal behaviour and mental health problems.²¹ And in the USA, a study carried out for the National Conference of State Legislatures to provide input on the legislative role in improving child welfare, after analysing data from multiple sources, concluded:

“The longer a child is in placement, the greater the chance that he or she will move from one foster placement to another, placing the child at further risk of negative social and emotional outcomes. **Frequent moves mean that the child faces continuing disruption of relationships** with friends, siblings and other relatives, coaches, teachers, classmates, religious leaders and others. Children may move from their original schools multiple times during the school year. Frequent changes in caseworkers, judges and legal representation also interfere with child well-being and achievement of a permanent home.”²²

In its international study [*How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: A Challenge to Human Rights*](#), ATD Fourth World shared what it has learned about the fight against poverty from grassroots work that it and other NGOs have carried out with families in Burkina Faso, Guatemala, Haiti, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States. In the face of poverty, parents can show unstinting resilience and courage on behalf of their children, making enormous efforts to safeguard relationships and keep the family together. But these efforts also sap people’s energies and hopes in ways that can delay and even sabotage their attempts to escape poverty.

If this determination of parents and children in extreme poverty to live together is so strong, what would happen if we dared put this aspiration at the heart of our anti-poverty policies? What if this aspiration enabled us to create links among the many policies that can be so hard to harmonize at international, local and national levels? What if this aspiration brought together economic policies and human rights policies, employment policies and access to culture? What if building on the aspiration of parents and children to live together enabled us once and for all to put an end to extreme poverty?²³

20 [Youth leaving care, residential stability and instability and homelessness](http://edjep.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Please-click-here-for-the-report.pdf), <http://edjep.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Please-click-here-for-the-report.pdf>

21 [FEANTSA: Changing Faces: Homelessness Among Children, Families and Young People](#)

22 [https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/cyf/Social Emotional WellBeing_Newsletter.pdf](https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/cyf/Social_Emotionial_WellBeing_Newsletter.pdf)

23 Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General United Nations March 2004, preface of *“How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: A Challenge to Human Rights”*

The impact of the pandemic

The pandemic has highlighted and even exacerbated social inequalities. All the factors that disempower people living in poverty and make them vulnerable to social and institutional abuse have been exposed.

However, the pandemic is not necessarily the worst of the difficulties faced by families living in extreme poverty: it comes on top of many other recurrent health threats such as malnutrition, cholera, Ebola, dysentery, and the chronic diseases related to poverty. Other challenges weigh heavily on very poor families as well: drought, floods, and climate change make subsistence farming even more difficult. The poorest are thus not only subject to health risks, but also to additional economic, social and environmental difficulties related to the pandemic.²⁴

According to the UN,

Globally, the number of people living in extreme poverty declined from 36 per cent in 1990 to 10 per cent in 2015. But the pace of change is decelerating and the COVID-19 crisis [risks reversing decades of progress](#) in the fight against poverty. [New research](#) published by the UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research warns that the **economic fallout from the global pandemic could increase global poverty by as much as half a billion people**, or 8% of the total human population. This would be the first time that poverty has increased globally in thirty years, since 1990. More than [700 million people](#), or 10 per cent of the world population, still live in extreme poverty today, struggling to fulfil the most basic needs like health, education, and access to water and sanitation... [8 per cent](#) of employed workers and their families worldwide lived in extreme poverty in 2018. One out of five children live in extreme poverty. Ensuring social protection for all children and other vulnerable groups is critical to reduce poverty.²⁵

Extreme poverty, the result of deliberate political choices

The current health crisis clearly shows that our societies, in drawing up their programmes and policies, have never reached and still do not reach the poorest population groups, let alone the most deprived among them, in order to put into place the measures required not only to change their present conditions, but also to conceive with them a better future for all.

A member of ATD Fourth World with a direct experience of extreme poverty clearly spelled out the main reason why so little progress has been made:

When we talk about eradicating - or even alleviating poverty, we tend to talk a lot about a lack of political will. But that's misleading. Poverty doesn't exist simply because of a lack of political will; in our world today **poverty exists**

24 ATD Quart Monde, "L'impact de la crise provoquée par la pandémie Covid-19 sur les plus pauvres à travers le monde"
25 <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty/>

because of deliberate political choices.

Poverty doesn't affect vulnerable people, like a natural disaster; poverty is manmade. People are marginalized based on their perceived worth or lack thereof, in a specific cultural and social environment and pushed into poverty. This virus just followed the path resulting from this push; getting into the cracks, and in some instances wide open gaps in our society. The risk factors of COVID-19 infection for people living in poverty have been designed by political choice, and institutionalized based on the perceived worth of people long before this virus.²⁶

Her perception was corroborated by Dr. Richard Kozul-Wright, Director of the Globalization and Development Strategies Division, UNCTAD, in his statement at the 2020 Social Forum of the UN Human Rights Council: "This is not a world where people are being left behind. No one is left behind in this hyper-globalized world. Everybody is inter-connected in one way or another to this system. Lots of people are thrown under the bus in a hyper-globalized world, but being thrown under the bus is a very different experience from being left behind."²⁷

All these factors explain and reinforce the persistence of poverty.

The need for systemic change to break longstanding cycles of poverty and inequality

Michèle Bachelet emphasized at the 2020 Social Forum organized by the Human Rights Council that "COVID-19 has brought to the fore the inequality pandemic overlooked by many ... It is time to stop looking the other way. We cannot want - or accept - going back to a so-called normality that made our societies so vulnerable, so fragile, so unequal - and so unjust."²⁸

Likewise, the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, stated on International Mother Earth Day:

As the world begins planning for a post-pandemic recovery, the United Nations is calling on Governments to seize the opportunity to "build back better" by creating more sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies. The current crisis is an unprecedented wake-up call. We need to turn the recovery into a real opportunity to do things right for the future.²⁹

Rebuilding back better means breaking the cycles of poverty and inequality that have endured over generations. It requires strengthening our commitment to all human rights for all and to the goals of sustainable development; it means keeping a promise that we have so far failed to keep: to leave no one behind.

26 Speech by Maryann Broxton, ATD Fourth World research coordinator on the hidden dimensions of poverty in the United States, during the webinar: "The impact of COVID-19 on the rights of people living in poverty", organized during the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council

27 R. Kozul-Wright, UNCTAD, at the 2020 Social Forum of the UN Human Rights Council, Geneva, 9 October 2020.

28 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/SocialForum2020.aspx>

29 <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-urges-countries-%E2%80%98build-back-better%E2%80%99>

How can we, in a common effort, prevent our societies from continuing, as they have done for generations, to “throw the poorest under the bus”?

ATD Fourth World hopes that in rebuilding our societies in the aftermath of the current pandemic, we will find ways to interrupt the cycles of intergenerational poverty that currently violate the social, economic, and cultural rights of so many.

Recommendations

1) Adopt an approach based on human rights

As affirmed in the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, “That extreme poverty is not inevitable means that the tools for ending it are within reach. A human rights approach provides a framework for the long-term eradication of extreme poverty based on the recognition of persons living in extreme poverty as rights holders and agents of change.”³⁰

The Guiding Principles then list the rights that are the most essential to lifting people out of poverty, and the measures that need to be put into place to ensure the enjoyment of those rights.

2) Ensure the genuine participation of people living in poverty in policy-making

*"The poorest people have seen so many reforms and revolutions that have brought them nothing. They are both ways of dealing the cards differently to those already playing. In order to make room for new players, dealing the cards differently is not enough: the rules of the game have to be changed. [...] By asking everyone the question about the poorest, [ATD Fourth World] affirms its conviction that everyone has something to contribute to the invention of new rules."*³¹ Joseph Wresinski

As expressed in the Guiding Principles,

Effective and meaningful participation is an affirmation of the right of every individual and group to take part in the conduct of public affairs...States must ensure the active, free, informed and meaningful participation of persons living

30 https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights_EN.pdf, p. 2.
31 Joseph Wresinski, *The poor are the church*, ATD Fourth World, 2002.

in poverty at all stages of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of decisions and policies affecting them.³²

The lived reality of poverty is expert knowledge: it is important because it deepens our knowledge about the implications of living in poverty. This experience is all the more enlightening when combined with knowledge from other professional sources, and is essential to meeting the challenge of developing more effective systems and structures to end poverty and inequality.

Achieving genuine participation means striving to work together on an equal footing and valuing the expertise gained through the lived experience of poverty as much as expertise from other perspectives. True participation requires time, careful planning and commitment, especially to avoid possible power imbalances which may prevent frank and open discussion. Participation under these conditions will empower the poorest people and enable them to regain control over their lives.

Having the poorest as actors and partners at the table where the future of our societies is being built will also force us to revisit not only current events, but also the history of poverty within our societies.

This partnership is difficult but possible.³³

3) Promote a revolution in mentalities by combating stigmatization

The skills of people living in poverty and their contributions to society are often not recognized. But the lack of recognition of these wider contributions reinforces negative stereotypes of people experiencing poverty. These stereotypes are so powerful that people experiencing poverty often internalize them, and thus devalue or undervalue their skills, experiences and contributions - they often lack self-esteem and feel ashamed and judged.

Stigma, blame and judgement result from the way people experiencing poverty are treated in society by the public, media and politicians. They serve as tacit or explicit justification for their exclusion and result in the deprivation of their rights. In addition to making people feel useless, the stigmatization leads them to adopting behaviour to avoid dehumanization. Some, for example, may avoid interactions with other people in order to minimize shame.

Actions such as the following are needed to combat stigmatization and its damaging impact of people living in extreme poverty:

³² [Ibid.](#), paragraphs 37 and 38, p. 10.

³³ For years ATD Fourth World has been developing the [practice of this participation with institutions](#). It is based on the methodology of [Merging Knowledge](#), to overcome differences in speaking and thinking, life experience and perspective, so that constructive discussions can occur and new knowledge can be built.

- Provide information on the unrecognized contribution of people experiencing poverty to those, such as journalists, who shape the understanding of poverty. Public debates on poverty should move beyond the worn-out stereotypes that portray people experiencing poverty as passive recipients of public support and move towards recognizing their contribution to improving their own situation, and that of their families and their communities. The experience of living in poverty forges resistance, intelligence and courage which form the basis for solidarity and creative actions.

Following a government campaign in the United Kingdom targeting welfare benefit fraud, ATD Fourth World members with an experience of poverty designed a project to help the public discover the positive role they play in society. This project, [The Roles We Play](#), demonstrated the courage and solidarity demonstrated by people in poverty. It underlined the fact that they do not want others to take pity on them; rather they seek recognition of their equal right to dignity and of the rarely noticed contributions they make to society. They are active defenders of human rights within their communities.

- Enact legislation that sanctions discrimination for reasons of social or economic status, along with other groups that benefit from such protection

In France, over a period of six years ATD Fourth World advocated for the inclusion of criteria on social vulnerability in the [Anti-Discrimination Act](#), with the support of the French Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination Commission (HALDE). A draft bill was presented to the French National Assembly that acknowledged “vulnerability resulting from one’s economic situation.” [The new law](#) passed unopposed on June 14, 2016. Similar initiatives are also progressing in the Netherlands and in Ireland.

- Avoid the creation of ghettos by ensuring social mixing in housing and schooling, and through activities for children and youth that are inclusive.
- Include discussions of the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in schools, with an emphasis on the dignity of every person, non-discrimination, and the right to participation.
- Incorporate into the preparation of government personnel who will be in contact with people living in extreme poverty – such as social workers, judges, police – sessions with community groups representing people living in extreme poverty, in order to sensitize them to the realities of extreme poverty and appropriate and constructive responses.

4) Maintain and support the ties between parents and children to the extent possible

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 24 February 2010, affirm that:

Removal of a child from the care of the family should be seen as a measure of last resort and should, whenever possible, be temporary and for the shortest possible duration. Removal decisions should be regularly reviewed and the child's return to parental care, once the original causes of removal have been resolved or have disappeared, should be in the best interests of the child.... Financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely imputable to such poverty, should never be the only justification for the removal of a child from parental care, for receiving a child into alternative care, or for preventing his/her reintegration, but should be seen as a signal for the need to provide appropriate support to the family.³⁴

The special attention to children living in poverty and the investment needed to give them the same opportunities as others should not lead social services to forget the role of parents and the environment. Many early childhood policies are ill-conceived and fail because parents are not considered as the first partners in ensuring a child's psychological and physical development. On the contrary, they are too often blamed and automatically considered responsible for the poverty their children experience, rather than being provided the support that they require.

Following the adoption of the above Guidelines, UNICEF and a group of NGOs, including ATD Fourth World, developed a handbook on their implementation. Chapter 5 on "The Necessity Principle: Preventing the need for alternative care," spells out the forms of support to families that can enable them to provide the care their children need, and thus avoid the trauma of separation. Within the context of an integrated approach to financial support and access to basic services, these measures include parenting support; specialist services for families in specific circumstances, such as those with children with disabilities; and the creation of groups where parents can meet together.³⁵

[In Haiti, ATD Fourth World](#) is leading a project that links health and education. One of the components of this project is aimed at children from 0 to 3 years of age and their parents and offers access to health care for the family, health education, and monitoring of child development with an emphasis on caring for malnourished children. The involvement of parents and the recognition of their knowledge and their efforts, together with the spaces for co-training and dialogue strongly contribute to the improvement of health within the family. In the same way, the role of parents in the preschool component contributes to the success of the children both in their learning and in their socialization. It is a project that is a source of pride to parents and children, whereas often the parents of malnourished children are blamed by others. It also enables the children to thrive in a school where their environment is not discredited.

³⁴ Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly, A/RES/64/142*, paras. 14 and 15.
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/5416/pdf/5416.pdf>

³⁵ Moving Forward: [Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children,'](#) Centre for Excellence for looked after children in Scotland (CELCIS), International Social Service (ISS); Oak Foundation; SOS Children's Villages International; and United Nations Children's Fund, 2012,

5) Make access to a free and quality education for all a priority

The concept of an education for all must be adapted according to each cultural context. Educational programmes should be provided within safe reach of all population groups, including those who are especially difficult to reach, such as children living in the street, or in slums or remote rural areas.

Rather than delivering a standard volume of education to the greatest number of pupils, emphasis should be on extending and complimenting the education provided by the community and working with parents to ensure that children receive an education that will help them improve their living conditions and those of their community.

Parents should be recognized as partners in children's educational success. The dialogue with them should be enhanced by including awareness of the impact of extreme poverty within teacher training in order to increase teachers' understanding of the issues such children face and thus provide them, and their parents, with the support and encouragement needed to succeed at school.

Measures should be introduced within education systems to mitigate all discrimination, stereotyping or bullying, including that experienced by children in extreme poverty, by teachers or fellow pupils, thus reducing school drop-out.

Direct and indirect costs must not be obstacles preventing children living in extreme poverty from attending and succeeding at school. To cover indirect costs (books, supplies, uniforms, school trips, school meals), resources, such as grants or scholarships, must be available to poor families to ensure equal access to education for all children.

In order to ensure that children are able to attend school without jeopardizing their family's income, cash transfers should be made available to the families to enable them to ensure the healthy development of all members of the family.

6) Develop inclusive and rights-based social protection systems

According to a recent UNICEF study,³⁶ on average one in four children under age 5 is not registered at birth. These children, from the poorest households, fail - even over time - to obtain a birth certificate, as do hundreds of millions of adults, and therefore remain without any legal existence. They are not entitled to enroll in school or to have a health card.

This legal non-existence makes them the most despised, discriminated against, exploited and hardest to reach and defend - in developed countries, for example, Roma populations, the homeless or "ghost citizens" also find themselves in this situation.

And the lack of education condemns them to economic activities in the poorest paid sectors.

In setting up reliable birth registration systems, digital systems have been found to be very effective for a country-wide response. However, it is important to take into account that communities facing poverty may be excluded from the use of digital technology. Thus, community-based approaches need to be created. For example, in Senegal, some town halls organize "fairground audiences," for an occasional decentralization of civil-state services in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Associations such as ATD Fourth World can be encouraged to support individuals and families who have greater difficulty to follow these processes, particularly those who have to collect documents from provinces from which they have moved, or find baptismal certificates or witnesses as to their identities.

In developing countries, social protection systems must be built with people living in poverty, and with the objective of providing security for the two billion workers who are in informal employment and who do not have access to a set of rights and security. Yet they create wealth.

In the developed countries, the current systems need to be profoundly reformed because they are not effective in arresting the persistence of extreme poverty: instead of supporting the efforts of people living in poverty to get out of misery, they tend to maintain exclusion, and to become shackles that discourage, punish, control, keep in care and hinder the social mobility of marginalized people and groups.

In asylum policies, for example, restricting access to public benefits and prohibiting people from working are ways of using poverty as a political tool. Efforts must be made to build trust between people who use and provide services, and that work to reduce poverty and maximize well-being.

7) Adopt a multidimensional approach to poverty

Understanding poverty in all its forms requires a focus on income as well as on the wider implications of living without financial security. Poor health, stigma and judgement and a lack of control are all aspects that remain too little understood.

Lived realities are often the best represented through human voices. However, policy debates often make use of statistics, such as the official Households Below Average Incomes series, that use money as the central indicator. Quantitative monetary indicators are important to inform and drive public policy; however, our results suggest that understanding poverty in all its forms requires approaches that go beyond income. Only a multidimensional approach to poverty will effectively and sustainably achieve social, environmental, and economic justice for all.