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Europe launches battle against growing poverty

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by Kate Holman in Strasbourg

Trade unions are backing a new Europe-wide campaign against poverty and social exclusion, launched last week with a European Union budget of almost £15 million and scheduled to run until the end of the year.

Despite a pledge by EU leaders 10 years ago to "make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty" by 2010, the number of Europeans living on or below the poverty threshold has grown to 84 million – 17 per cent of the population – including 19 million children, with the economic crisis deepening divisions between rich and poor in many countries.

In 2008, the EU agreed to earmark 2010 as the Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion – tackling a range of factors that keep people on the margins of society such as discrimination, disability, homelessness, poor education and ill health.

The European Trade Union Confederation, together with NGOs such as the European Anti-Poverty Network, is involved in the year and says it will use it to mobilise members and press for more proactive policies.

ETUC confederal secretary Józef Niemiec said: "Poverty and social exclusion are evils still rooted in the EU, and the economic crisis has made the situation even worse. Combating poverty is not only about finding remedies but also about intervening beforehand, by reinforcing and improving social protection systems."

The ETUC's demands include a decent income for all and good quality, financially affordable social and healthcare services while the EAPN has called for "the renewal of a common vision for the type of society we want to create".

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