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Pandemics **Poverty** Politics

European Parliament Intergroup Against Poverty

On-line dialog with Civil Society

11 June 2020 | 10h00-11h30

## Intergroup on fighting against Poverty in the European Parliament

**call to ACTION**

July 2020

## The impact of Covid-19 on people experiencing poverty throughout Europe

On the 11 June 2020, the Intergroup on fighting against Poverty in the European Parliament organized an on-line hearing of civil society organisations<sup>1</sup>. The Intergroup wants to keep the fight against poverty high on the political agenda to make sure an ambitious action plan to combat poverty will become a reality. Starting our work as a re-established Intergroup speaking about the impact of Covid-19 was of course evident. In this particular and dramatic context, we need the highest attention to the situation and additional needs of people experiencing poverty, in view of their economic, social and health situations, in a spirit of solidarity and working towards the common good.

*We have to ensure that the resources for the recovery will support people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and to take clear and concrete actions. We need to guarantee and safeguard minimum level of dignity, both at European and national level, and we can do it focusing in particular on six aspects: minimum income, minimum wage, European Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme, housing, education and health. We can achieve our goals only if the intergroup fighting against poverty together with institutions and civil society are going to work as a team.*

**Pierfrancesco Majorino | Co-Chair, S&D**

Covid-19 has disproportionately affected people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. This has exposed and deepened the gross inequalities in our societies – around income and wealth, but also around other forms of discrimination including structural racism. Action on both the short and the long term is needed. Action on local, regional, national and European & international levels is crucial.

*The pandemic cannot be used to turn our back on social achievements, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights. We must make sure that all Europeans are able to access crucial services and we need to build **safeguards against poverty** in the recovery plans for the economy. We need to make sure that no one is left behind... not only to protect lives but also livelihoods.*

**Cindy Franssen | Co-Chair, EPP**

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<sup>1</sup> European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), Mental Health Social Exclusion Europa (SMES) and ATD Fourth World (ATD).

Before the crisis, approximately 20% of the EU population, were ‘at risk of poverty or social exclusion’ - in itself an unacceptable and unjust situation. With the crisis affecting children, single parents, people with disabilities, homeless people, and many more we must assume that poverty levels will rise at least to the levels seen during the economic crisis of 2008 – i.e. at least **123 million people, over 1 in 4** of the population, and probably significantly higher. With millions of jobs lost and almost 10% of people suffering from in-work poverty even before the pandemic, we must now be prepared for a severe social crisis.

*We must not forget that the last numbers available (Eurostat 2018) show us that 109 million people are living at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU. Knowing that “at risk” is just a euphemism... Millions of other citizens are above the poverty line for few euros and are not part of this already scandalous statistics.*

**Marisa Matias | Vice-President, GUE / NGL**

### **Covid-19 and homelessness**

At least 700.000 people experienced homelessness (i.e. live on the street or in a shelter) on any given day before the Covid-19 crisis in Europe and many more live in overcrowded or unsatisfactory accommodation that they cannot afford or that does not meet their needs. There are 70% more people living on the streets than 10 years ago. The number of homeless people has probably grown during the crisis and is likely to further increase as some lockdown measures are being relaxed, such as the moratoriums on evictions.

The Covid-19 crisis has shown that homelessness is a public health issue and that shelters are often inadequate and unsafe places to live in. Homeless people need housing just like any other member of society. Now is the time to promote housing-led/first approaches to homelessness and avoid going back to the “old normal”. The EU should support Member States in their efforts to solve homelessness and encourage them to stop “managing” homelessness in the shelter system.

### **Covid-19 and well-being**

There is no ‘health’ without social, physical, and mental health: the three indispensable resources for the well-being of the person. This crisis has exposed health and welfare systems that have ignored too many people experiencing poverty. It has shown that resources can be mobilised - if considered priorities - to provide affordable housing and better social and health care for vulnerable people.

Today society is struggling to calculate and quantify the effects of this pandemic, especially financially. Sometimes political responses give the impression of neglecting the mental health of those who have lost their homes, their jobs, who have seen their families reduced to relying on charities as lock-down

measures made their situation suddenly more precarious. We must not forget the fate of those elderly people that society no longer deemed necessary and the consequences for the mental health of the family and society as a whole. We need greater solidarity and recognition of rights to the socially excluded who live on the margins of our societies.

The drama of this pandemic has accentuated and highlighted the dysfunction of social and health systems which often do not offer sufficient responses and resources to provide social protection and adequate minimum income schemes to those who need it. We must use this unique situation as an opportunity to express our European values of dignity, freedom and solidarity.

### **Covid-19, families and children**

Families and children all over Europe, especially those having a precarious housing situation and limited or no access to digital communication technology passed an infernal period during lockdown. All must be done to avoid that this causes a long-term negative impact on the learning capability and education opportunities of children. Decent housing and access to digital tools and competences are key factors.

Fear and feelings of abandonment added an extra layer of suffering. Despite many positive examples to connect with the most left behind, the pandemic made us more aware of abandonment and discrimination. The design and implementation of policies should make sure no one is left behind.

*UN predicts 500 million more poor people in the world as a consequence of the Covid crisis, which means a 30-year setback in anti-poverty policies. The existence of this intergroup has never been more urgent and essential. What we also need to focus on from now on is the ecological aspect of poverty: the social and ecological emergencies urge us to fight against unequal exposure to pollution, environmental health and damages while we need to ensure equal participation in every environmental policies.*

**Marie Toussaint | Vice President, Greens / EFA**

## The European Parliament's Intergroup on the Fight Against Poverty calls for:

1. An **overarching European anti-poverty strategy**, with ambitious **targets for reducing poverty and ending extreme poverty in Europe by 2030**, in respect of the principles laid down in the European Pillar of Social Rights and taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. A guarantee that **the economic and financial recovery measures and their impact in the future**, namely when loans need to be repaid, **will not be an extra burden for the most vulnerable**. Social responsible public investment and tax justice will be key tools to finance the recovery, and must be prioritised at all levels to ensure that people experiencing poverty do not pay for the recovery.
3. A **European legal framework to guarantee adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income schemes** for everyone who needs it throughout the European Union, and throughout the life cycle. This would recognize that strong social protection schemes must be a crucial component of more resilient and more cohesive societies and would send a true signal from the European Union that it is committed to concretely protecting the most vulnerable from the impacts of the crisis. Concretely, we call on the Commission to propose a concrete EU instrument to guarantee adequate, accessible and enabling income support, turning Principle 14 of the Pillar of Social Rights into reality.
4. An **EU Framework for national homelessness strategies** coordinated and facilitated by the Commission. This Framework should include activities such as data collection, the monitoring of policy progress, and the promotion of best practices, whilst addressing Principle 19 of the Pillar of Social Rights. The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESF+ in particular) can be used to address homelessness.
5. It is more important than ever to put children at the heart of the EU's recovery strategy. **A Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee** set within the framework of the Pillar approach of the Investing in Children Recommendation (enabling access to adequate resources, services and participation) is needed to support the EU's children in the long run. In this context, it is particularly important to make sure that **every child has the possibility to have access to (digital) education** and the necessary support in doing so in order to prevent social and educational exclusion and ensure a positive future for all children by breaking the vicious circle of poverty.
6. Ensure that **funds in the proposed ESF+ are ring-fenced** for an effective combat against poverty and social exclusion, developing clear criteria to track and monitor this expenditure. It is crucial that a continued and reinforced **support for the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived** is assured to support organizations and institutions reacting on the short-term to the covid-19 crisis, thus preventing some of the harshest consequences on the mid- to long term.