

## Youth Poverty in Europe

**An increasing number of young people in Europe experience poverty. According to Eurostat in the year 2011 youth unemployment in Spain was 46,4 % and in the whole of the EU 21,4 % for 18-24 years old people. Up to today these figures keep rising.**

Poverty and discrimination are closely linked to each other. There are certain groups who are more affected by discrimination and poverty than others, for example disadvantaged young people, young single parents, young people with disabilities, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, Roma, non-EU citizens and those not in education, employment or training.

Poverty and social exclusion have negative impact on health and well-being of young people in poverty. They increase the risk for mental health problems, affect self-esteem and personal dignity and reduce life expectancy.

Poverty slows down a young person's autonomy and self-development process, prevents young people from planning the future, and reduces social capital.

To escape from the vicious circle of poverty, young people in poverty need to be heard. Policy makers should incorporate the problems of young people in poverty and their proposals into the decision making processes.

However in practice these young people very rarely get the chance to participate in civil society and politics. Some examples which lead to success in this matter are mentoring programmes for young people in poverty in schools, work places, etc., community outreach, local youth councils or prevention programmes.

## PARTICIPANTS OF THE SEMINAR



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# AKTIV GEGEN ARMUT

IB für Würde und Teilhabe



## JOINT DECLARATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE SEMINAR TOGETHER AGAINST YOUTH POVERTY

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## Introduction

In October 2012, 32 specialists from 14 organisations from France, Spain, England, Poland, Sweden and Germany, who are all involved in the fight against youth poverty in different contexts, came together in Berlin.

Youth poverty today is one of the greatest challenges all across Europe. In three days the group elaborated a joint declaration, which points out urgent questions and indicates solutions which already created success stories in different countries. Exciting, intense and sometimes controversial discussions led to an insight into a selection of the various aspects of youth poverty. Our paper is shaped from the richness of perspectives of Europe and reaches from general to very specific demands, examples and suggestions.

Specialists working with young people on the local level as well as political actors can take advantage from looking beyond their own horizons. We invite all readers to be inspired by our declaration in order to think about new innovative approaches to fight youth poverty!

### The organisers

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The declaration was prepared in German and English. It will be translated by the involved experts to their own languages.

## General Recommendations

### 1. Reinforce exchange between authorities and young people in poverty

- Empower young people to raise their voice so that they can participate in society.
- Particularly local authorities should include young people in poverty in the decision making process.
- Make sure that the message of young people (in poverty) is heard by policy makers.
- Local authorities should actively involve young people in poverty in decision making processes.
- Mobilisation of social workers and teachers and their involvement with European or national networks.
- Train social workers / teachers to help young people in poverty speak for themselves and that their opinions are important.
- Preventive outreach work / working with young people on the street / community development.
- Evidence based policy making based on reality, not assumptions and stereotypes (more research actions with people in poverty).
- Create opportunities for young people in poverty to participate in society.

### 2. Reinforce and not reduce welfare states around Europe

- Access to welfare should not be based on documentation in any EU-country.
- Social costs (e.g. black economy, health, crime) of poverty should be included in the policy making process.
- Everyone has the right to food, public education, housing, health, free movement, work – particularly refugees and undocumented asylum seekers) –and identity (e.g. Roma).

### 3. Maintain funding for mutual learning on a European level

- Share experiences and best practices among social workers, institutions and policy makers.
- Allow young people in Europe to experience cross-border mobility.

### 4. Recognise diversity of people in Europe

- Integrate diversity training into national education plans.

## I Education for all

### How should education be designed or organized in order to motivate young people and to best facilitate their choices for a professional career?

We have the duty to educate all our young people because their future is important to them and to us. Formal, non formal and informal education should provide young people choices, especially the choice to make their own decisions even if they are decisions that challenge and criticize the current order. Our system of education needs to involve them in decision making that empowers them to have ownership of their lives. Many problems young people face are not of their making but they have to live with the consequences of decisions taken by adults.

Young people in poverty are more silent and invisible than other young people and need to be given their voice. Our key principle is that poor and rich people should share the same opportunities.

### EXAMPLES FOR GOOD PRACTICE

- Practice that involves parents in their child's education in a positive way. Not blaming, lecturing or attacking but including them in after school activity, excursions and other opportunities.
- Providing young people in danger of dropout with mentors (e.g. retired people).
- Providing special grants for extra lessons to families (e.g. the education support program - UK).
- Giving money to young people in need, when they enter further and non compulsory education (e.g. Education Maintenance Allowance in the UK).

- Vocational training of young and re-training of older people together in order to exchange experiences and to reduce barriers between the generations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Sufficient number of social workers at school** who can help the students with their problems.
- **Every student should have access to a person of trust** (teacher, other adult, older student etc.) who can help him/her in school and private life.
- **Fewer students per class**
- **More teachers in the classroom** – facilitate pupil-oriented approaches.
- **Teacher training that has more practical elements** and allows teachers to change careers.
- **Create schools where young people have a real voice** and can make their own decisions.
- **Create schools not only as an institution but as an open place where people like to be** (students, parents, people outside school, local civil society, etc.).
- **European learning mobility** should be included in national education programs.

A European youth exchange on the topic “young poverty – vicious circles” took place in parallel to the European seminar. The young people concluded with the following statement:

### OUR STATEMENT

There are many **reasons** for the existence of youth poverty:

- **Parents** often have problems with **addictions** or there may be **domestic violence** within a household, which sometimes can result in children leaving home.
- An **unsupportive attitude** of the poor parents towards education can lead to children struggling at school which then leads to problems as they grow older (skipping school, getting involved in the antisocial activities, early pregnancy, etc).
- In larger families, where parents must work a lot to make ends meet, the **older children** can often be required to take on the role of carer for younger children, perform household tasks and sometimes even take a part-time job – all while trying to maintain a normal school routine, this leads to **falling behind** in school and extra-curricular activities.
- Many people who have low income or live on the streets are either **too proud or ashamed** to go to the job centre or feel there is a **prejudice** against street life and unemployment.
- The **welfare system** is often **complex** and **opaque** and there is a perception that it may be easier to live on the streets than to deal with the bureaucracy.

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## II Access to the labour market

### What should be done to support young people in their access to the labour market to enable them to grow in independence?

Our priority concern is with young people who face difficulty in accessing the labour market even in good economic times. Young people who are socially excluded already feel as though they lack power and self determination, so in the current climate they feel even more powerless.

So, these young people need to be part of the discussion about solutions, their voice needs to be heard and it needs to be their own voice. It doesn't help young people to be seen as victims or without a future, they need to see themselves as having value and a positive future. That means that they should be recognized as contributors to the economy as equal to adults.

Geographic mobility is a great opportunity for young people, but it is not a reason for paying less or eroding workers rights. It provides opportunities for some young people but can create harsher competition for others.

### EXAMPLES FOR GOOD PRACTICE

- Social investments funds that target communities in poverty have been effective in some countries (e.g. Sweden).
- Examples from the UK of intensive and forgiving support for young people not in education, employment or training such as Jamie Oliver's "13 project" provide a good model for action.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Early intervention is vital, before young people are 16/17 and **within the family**, not just addressing young people.
- Formal education should not be used as an alternative to work; **we need education that prepares young people for employment** and circles not only around collecting certificates.
- Preparedness for work needs to begin in school. **There needs to be a shift in emphasis so that the school system prepares young people for employment.**
- At a local level, **the involvement and empowerment and participation of young people in poverty is happening** but at a low level. It can and should be much improved.
- For those young people who are not in education, employment or training there needs to be **an integrated process and a determined approach**. That should include a local coordinator of services to support these young people.
- **We should not allow school drop outs, we won't let them drop out!**
- A European **"youth guarantee"** should provide real and lasting opportunities for young people, not just serve as a target to reach.
- The increasingly **precarious working conditions of the working poor throughout Europe should be challenged**.

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In one week our group of 26 young representatives of 5 European countries explored the theme of poverty through different media, such as video interviews, artwork and drama. We compared the varying issues connected to poverty in different countries across the EU. And we came to the following conclusions:

- **Education** is one of the cornerstones for a brighter future. In our opinion Finland seems to be a good example of both successful education and social support systems.
- A **campaign** with the aim of changing the public perspective on poverty would be a useful method of reducing the stigma that is attached to people in this situation.
- There needs to be more **information** provided about **services** available (including about free refresher courses, social welfare payments, subsidies, etc). These services need to be easy to access for all people and must maintain a high level of transparency in everything they do.
- **Social support** needs to be improved for those who are already struggling in order to stop the cycle from repeating itself. This should include help for young parents to complete or return to their education.
- There should be more **projects** aimed towards enabling **asylum seekers** to be seen as ambassadors for their cultures which can greatly enrich the European environment.

### III Health and well being

#### What are the most important factors in order to protect and support health for young people?

Poverty makes people ill. Children and young people from socially disadvantaged families have lower health prospects: According to the results of the study "Health Behaviour in School-aged Children 2011" the health situation of socially disadvantaged young people is increasingly worrying.

#### EXAMPLES FOR GOOD PRACTICE

- In Sweden and in the UK children's health is monitored and assessed. Children's needs identified from their health assessments are explored in consultation with parents. Then, appropriate services and treatments are developed to meet the child's needs.
- In Sweden it is compulsory for school nurses to carry out regular medical examinations and refer the child to other health services if needed.
- Healthy eating for children and young people in schools should be implemented according to the Swedish example.
- All children must have access to a healthy affordable lunch in school without a stigmatising procedure.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is necessary to offer **health promotion activities especially to the disadvantaged in their own home and community**. Health promotion starts where people live, work, learn, play and consume. We need kinder-

gartens and schools in a healthy setting. Health promotion must be implemented in educational institutions.

- The promotion of good health in early childhood has to ensure that the relevant practitioners such as midwives and paediatric doctors create a good support system in the neighbourhood. **Specialists have to work together to identify the needs of children and young people and their families as well as to put the necessary support into practice** („team around the child“).
- **All children have the right of maintaining their health** (Article 24 of the UN Convention on Children's Rights). This right should be implemented regardless of economic constraints.
- Health promotion it is not a priority in our health systems. All practitioners have to learn and understand that **salutogenesis precedes pathogenesis and good health promotion precedes treating the ill**.
- Each health system must provide **part of its financial budget for preventative measures**, especially for the disadvantaged.
- Health services have to be **accessible for everybody without any bureaucratic and financial obstacles**.

