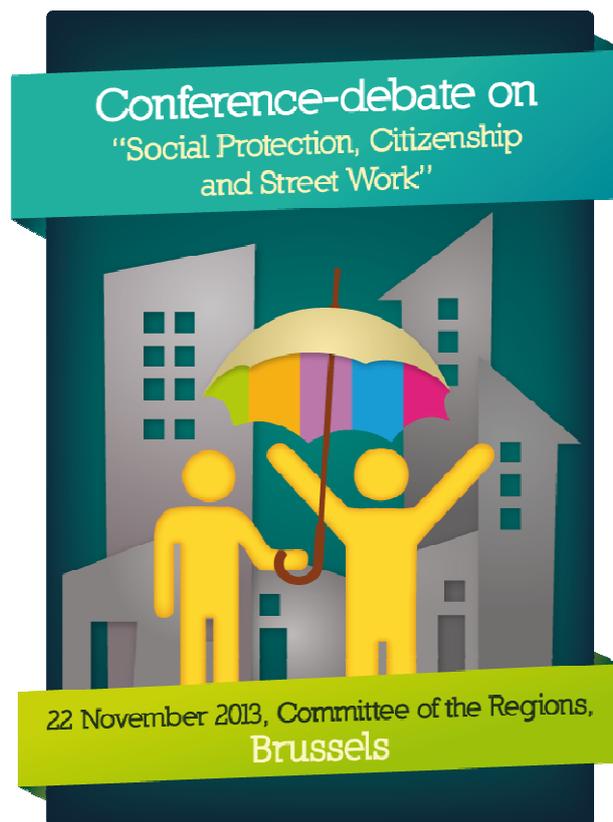

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF DYNAMO INTERNATIONAL – STREET WORKERS NETWORK
SOCIAL PROTECTION, CITIZENSHIP AND STREET WORK



In this current economic climate, a significant proportion of European citizens find themselves living in extremely precarious situations, depending on State-provided social services. Nowadays, the economic and financial crisis has a twofold impact on the **most vulnerable members** of society.

First, people in a disadvantageous situation on the labour market are the **first victims of the economic recession** and the first to see their living conditions deteriorate: the lowest income groups, in other words young people, migrants and poorly-qualified workers are the most affected by the increase in unemployment¹. These are the groups which are also at the highest risk of falling into debt, insolvency and loss of security (housing, social security, healthcare, education and training). Support for these individuals through social policies is all the more necessary at present.

Second, the austerity measures imposed by European states affected by the crisis in an effort to rebalance their budgets lead to **restrictions in social benefits provision**. Although social protection systems vary greatly from one European country to another, in general the sectors most affected by these restrictive measures are pensions, health insurance systems and unemployment². These measures represent an additional burden to members of society who are already in precarious situations, such as young people, women, older people and persons with disabilities. This is particularly true for people in street situations.

Youth exclusion is one of the greatest social challenges. In January 2013, one in five young people were unemployed in Europe. This has a serious impact on the future of social protection systems since youth unemployment can be expected to turn into long-term unemployment³. Above and beyond the cost that unemployment incurs for society, this situation can have alarming consequences for young individuals, lowering their self-esteem, leaving their ambitions unrealised, and delaying their assumption of an independent adult life⁴. **Children are the most at risk of poverty** and social exclusion⁵. Over the past two decades, in many European countries the risk of poverty has moved from the elderly population to young people.

This year 2013 – **the European Year of Citizens** –, it is particularly important to enable each individual to take up their place in society in order to guarantee respect for the rights set out in the Charter of **Fundamental Rights of the European Union** for all citizens, such as entitlement to social security benefits, social assistance to ensure a decent existence (Art. 34), or indeed children's rights to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being (Art. 24)⁶. It is also important to ensure that these rights are fulfilled in order to **prevent social fragmentation**.

The crisis and social insecurity highlight the urgent need to provide viable, long-term social protection. It is time to ask ourselves: **what importance does the European Union** place on its citizens and to what extent do **social protection systems** facilitate the **inclusion of marginalised individuals within society**? European policies which are purely centred on economic objectives ignore the complexity of what social protection represents. Participatory citizenship, economic competitiveness and social cohesion are interrelated and mutually reinforcing⁷.

¹ European Commission. COM(2010) 16.12.2010 *The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion*.

² Barbora Brlayova (under the guidance of Mr Philippe Steck). *Crise et protection sociale en Europe*. Publication de la Caisse d'allocation familiale. (Crisis and social protection in Europe. Publication of the Family Benefits Office).

³ European Commission. February 2013. *Social Europe. Current Challenges and the way forward. Annual Report of the Social Protection Committee (2012)*.

⁴ European Parliament. 22013/2045(INI) 8.4.2013 *DRAFT REPORT on tackling youth unemployment: possible ways out. Committee on Employment and Social Affairs*.

⁵ According to a study conducted by the EU's Social Protection Committee in June 2012

⁶ Official Journal of the European Union C303/2 14.12.2007. *Information from the institutions and bodies of the European Union. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2007/C 303/01)*.

⁷ Bryony Hoskins and David Kerr. 10.5.2012. *Final Study Summary and Policy recommendations. Participatory Citizenship in the European Union*. Commissioned by the European Commission, Europe for Citizens Programme.

Faced with the **urgency** of the situation, **social protection** must feature as a priority on political agendas. The current crisis has revealed the extent to which European economic systems depend on each other and the importance of **policy coordination** between the countries of the EU.

Even though various policy instruments are already in place, there needs to be continued effort to support the **most vulnerable** so that **Social Europe** becomes a reality for everybody.

THE STREET REALITY

People living in precarious situations or in poverty are often marginalised due to the fact that they have limited participation in community life. With few alternatives open to them, these people often consider the street as the best option (or the lesser evil) for getting by. There are many reasons which drive a person to live in the street. Poverty is one of them, but social security and protection policies also have a significant role to play.

Social protection is a **recognised human right**⁸, but the social and political realities of the past few years seem to increasingly reduce the issue of people in street situations to a matter of individual choice rather than of public responsibility. In the majority of European countries, there are no appropriate public policies and budgets specifically earmarked for street populations. The other extreme in terms of welfare system perception is the **criminalisation of poverty**, which is frequently the response given by public authorities as regards the street phenomenon.

To this effect, **street social workers** are often **first-hand witnesses** of a reality that is only getting worse, particularly in the aftermath of austerity measures implemented by European governments.

In accordance with basic human rights, street social work strives to **protect and provide** the most vulnerable populations **with the means to protect themselves**. The street worker is often the only person to come into direct contact with people living in street situations. In some cases, he or she is the first and last link in the chain of education and social support, when all other avenues have failed. However, street workers are not substitutes for institutions, they act as intermediaries.

When street workers lend a listening ear and provide support, they come across various requests and different ways of searching for solutions according to the needs of individuals in specific situations, with their own backgrounds and individual needs. It is precisely these **idiosyncrasies** that must be taken into consideration.

In light of this, street social workers play a key role in relation to the general public and political decision makers, in speaking out about rights that should be guaranteed for all human beings, no matter what their economic, social or cultural situation. Street work should be considered as a strong investment in social action in general and a community prevention action. By virtue of their regular, often daily, contact with particularly vulnerable populations, who are often victims of human rights violations, **street social workers are a valuable partner** for the local authorities and institutions concerned.

With this in mind, members of the International Network of Street Social Workers took part in the EU's Committee of the Regions' survey monitoring the effectiveness of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion⁹.

The following recommendations are the result of this consultation process and showcase grassroots experience in relation to European anti-poverty policies¹⁰.

⁸ Right to social security – Art. 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

⁹ Survey of the EU local and regional authorities on the Europe 2020 "European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion" Flagship Initiative, Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform, <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/europe2020/Pages/welcome.aspx>

¹⁰ "Social Street Workers' recommendations for combating poverty and social exclusion", Recommendation No.3, 2nd International "Words from the Street" Forum, organised by Dynamo International, Brussels, 26-30 October 2010

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF DYNAMO INTERNATIONAL – STREET WORKERS NETWORK

Social protection is a human right and can only bring one country upward by making it an asset for stable social construction. Social solidarity is the strength of a country as it is the best way to fight against poverty. We have the humanitarian duty in times of crisis to invest on social protection for all as economic shock absorber.

The situation in Europe is alarming: it is not merely individuals who are facing poverty and social exclusion, but increasingly entire families. Unfortunately, sometimes **poverty** becomes a **legacy that is handed down from generation to generation**. It is becoming a **political scandal** with the poor being increasingly singled out. The crisis has led to a minimal social response for people experiencing poverty.

Even though, on paper, most European countries are committed to social protection, grassroots organisations deplore the **lack of real, proactive public policy** which strives to help specific vulnerable groups such as street children or school drop-outs, the young unemployed, drug addicts, former offenders, victims of abuse and domestic violence.

This observation should be considered in light of a degree of weakening in States' commitments on social issues, primarily by delegation to local authorities and councils which have to determine their own priorities and long-term strategies or by a division of responsibilities between the State and local authorities (Czech Republic, Netherlands and France)¹¹. Furthermore, **funding for social services** tends to be channelled through an **intermediary in the private sector** with, for example, charitable organisations that operate using private donations.

Dynamo International – Street Workers Network encourages European institutions and European Union member states to adopt a social protection system that is accessible to everybody, equally, without discrimination and which should comply with the following criteria:

© Individual social protection

- Apply the principle of **individual rights** to social policies: social protection measures should focus on the individual needs, to provide appropriate support to the most excluded, and to be applied unconditionally from discriminatory and guilt-inducing factors. Poverty and difference cannot be condemned!¹²
- Ensure that each individual has the **financial resources** necessary for a dignified and fulfilled life: All individuals, regardless of their social situation, have the right to a **minimum level of financial, movable and cultural resources**, necessary to live a dignified and fulfilled life. All States must provide real security to their citizens. In this regard, it is not acceptable that people living in poverty and their children should be confined to managing the material aspects of daily life (paying bills, housing, filling the fridge, gaining access to health care, etc.).
- A **family allowance** granted by the State for any family with at least one child should be provided so that it covers the children's basic needs and it allows living a dignified life.
- **Low income and benefits should be increased to above the national poverty threshold** in each Member State. A minimum income should be guaranteed in all European countries. Families who depend on social

¹¹ In the Czech Republic, the State is responsible for social benefits and the local authorities are responsible for outreach work.

¹² The EU acts on behalf of EU citizens to prevent them being discriminated against on grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and sex. http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/index_en.htm

benefits or are on a low income spend a lot of time and energy trying to survive and find solutions to their daily problems. An appropriate, set income would help to reduce this continuous stress.

⊗ *Integrated policies and fiscal solidarity*

- **All States must provide a formal social protection system that is accessible to everybody.** Social protection is a recognised **human right** (Art 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).
- **Develop common financial and social policies at European level.** The open method of coordination, which is based on voluntary cooperation policy, showed that the adoption of targets and indicators did not lead to efficient social protection systems. There is a need for a strong European strategy that put - in a binding manner - social protection at the heart of national policies

⊗ *Preventive and educational work*

- **Investing in prevention:** Dynamo International strongly supports the position of the European Commission on the importance of prevention "to develop the skills and abilities of people and ensure an adequate level of life begins at a very early stage and continues throughout life."
- **Promoting education in all its dimensions** so that it is accessible to all non-formal and informal education , socio- cultural activities are essential to the development of individuals , particularly younger people with fewer opportunities or being marginalized. There is need to develop and strengthen without minimum age restriction, the specific programs and cross with all emancipatory social policies.
- **Alternative education options should be developed.** The informal education should be taken into account by teams of outreach workers, like all innovative methodologies.

⊗ *Access to services*

- Men, women and children must benefit from assistance that takes into account **access to culture, leisure, education, mobility, activities for well-being and social relations.** The amount of benefits allocated should not contribute to further isolating children and families.
- **Improve the access to early childhood services** in order to promote the **integration of women** into the labor market and combat the problem of gender inequality.

⊗ *Citizen consultation and participation*

- **Social protection policies should be developed in consultation with all stakeholders:** political decision-makers, institutional and socio-professional representatives (state, local authorities, public institutions, grassroots associations), in order to draw on their expertise and points of view, gain a better understanding and work with them on a partnership basis.
- Special attention should be paid to **collaboration with networks of grassroots workers and young people,** since their outreach work enables them to meet with the target populations and hear what they have to say.
- Combating poverty and social exclusion also involves **promoting the fundamental rights of each individual and particularly of vulnerable people and their rights as citizens.** Discrimination, of which they may be victims, is a barrier to escaping poverty and social exclusion and fertile ground for keeping them in a situation of poverty (e.g. parents who cannot find a job because they are from the Roma community; undocumented people who struggle to exert their rights).
- **Vulnerable populations should be encouraged to play an active role in community life and in decision-making processes.** But this also leads to the question of the real impact of these consultations as well as the target population being used as a tool. Volunteer work should not stop employment reintegration policies.

DIFFERENT REALITIES...

"...We work with young people from the street or brought up in social institutions. They face the problem with their ID cards, because the law in Bulgaria regarding having an ID, is that you need to have an address to get the documents. This means that all the homeless people cannot have documents if they cannot prove an address. Young people that were brought up in social institution have usually their first ID card with the address of the social home, but when it expires, they are in situation that they cannot have an ID if they don't have an address - a stable place for living. This problem is also for the people from Roma communities that live in illegal houses and cannot prove a property. They cannot have an ID card and in that case they cannot have social support - for children, for poverty and so on. In Bulgaria police can arrest you for 24h if you don't have an ID. So it's an unbreakable circle...."

Ulyana Matveeva, Bulgarian Platform of Street Workers

"(...) We demand another way to assess the social and political economy. It is necessary to introduce other parameters: what is saved (for instance in diseases), what is an investment for the immediate future (for instance education), and what is the cost of the lack of social cohesion. Indeed we can change practices, be more proficient, etcetera... but without questioning the principle. The State is created to defend and protect its citizens ... We need a common policy on social issues, to balance other political damages.... If there is a European Central Bank, there should also be a department that coordinates the policies in health, education, social and employment services, and requires basic agreements. With this new paradigm (taking into account local nuances, or accents, or traditions), we will be more effective and efficient , we can introduce " reforms," but mostly we can ensure dignity to all people , to maintain a democratic framework, to promote economic competitiveness of Europe worldwide, and to open a future of prosperity. Social protection is at the heart of this project."

Jon Etxeberria, Spanish Platform of Street Workers

"Although a minimum social protection system is widely applied and effective in France, it is important to be vigilant when this protection concerns aid for families in need. Indeed over time and governments, we can see variances as for the wish to provide social support to all. Now and again, someone think that a form of pressure to families would be necessary so that child education cancels excessive behaviours. Some "well-meaning" people raise the question of merit to be eligible for certain grants and palliative devices to different troubles. If parents are not able to properly raise their children so they do not harm society, social benefits could then be eliminated. To date, support for the poor in France is particularly well implemented. But vigilance is needed to face financial issues and public debt."

Philippe Roux, French Platform of Street Workers

...AND SHARED EXPERIENCES¹³

"I am extremely fond of this young girl, I am concerned about her; I share in her worries as she goes to sign up for school after spending six months on the streets and in squats. Her experience is worlds apart from the aseptic norm. I reassure her that she has skills but I don't lie to her about how things work as I am acutely aware that she is marginalised and will find it hard to fit in with institutions. On the streets she is the leader of the pack/the "tough" kid on the block, but when she looks at me all I see is a young girl crying out for help. In this world, she looks to me for reassurance of her right to live."

Anne-Lise Marchesani, Belgian Platform of Street Workers

¹³ Testimonials from the book "Street Workers - Life Stories" of Dynamo International - Street Workers Network, to be released in late 2013 with financial support from the EU Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013)

"All avenues we have taken to try to reintegrate him have been in vain. We received out-and-out rejections. And yet, he tells us that we are the only family he has and that without us he wouldn't know what to do. He regularly talks about committing suicide, but after continually trying to talk him out of it, he says that he would prefer prison and will do what he can to go to jail. The first three months he was in prison there was radio silence because he was not allowed to make phone calls during this period. The first call he made was to our centre and the only external contact he has is still with our centre. He calls us regularly in order to keep in constant contact with us. To date, he has been in prison for six months and our not-for-profit association has just received permission to go and visit him in prison".

Jean-Philippe Lagoda, Belgian Platform of Street Workers

"S. is a young 13-year-old Bulgarian (...) recent immigrant/immigrant child (...) and is unschooled (...). After speaking to his parents, we realised that his family lives in extremely precarious conditions and, as such, schooling their children is not a priority (...). During the rounds of the neighbourhood (we) remind him of the importance of going to school and the impact that dropping out could have for his future: illiteracy, lack of qualifications, increased difficulty in finding a job, (...) and then comes the obstacle course of trying to find a place that will agree to take on these children, even though the school is obliged to enrol all children, no matter what their administrative status, and even well into the school year.

Today S.'s family was evicted from their "housing" (...) No solution has been found to re-house them and since they were evicted, we have not heard from S. nor his family. Is the Belgian state not supposed to give children the same rights and opportunities no matter what their administrative status? For these children, and many others who use our service, this is clearly not the case!!!"

Gaëtan Pierard, Belgian Platform of Street Workers

"He came out of prison this morning and wandered around all day to find his way back "home" this evening, to the neighbourhood where he lived. In any case, does he have any other kind of "home" to go to? I can tell he is uptight, he has too much aggression bubbling away inside him; this violence comes from sending him out onto the streets without any money or prospects. Meeting up with what he calls a "clean" young person is important for him. He talks to me about himself, girlfriends, children, his problems and desire to resolve them, but after a year's training, he hasn't found a job but he says that he is going to stick at it! It is 2 o'clock, time for a final round of the neighbourhood and final conversations. This is part of the alliance between a street worker and her target population as a way of dealing with a dysfunctional system which brings about unacceptable situations which violate respect for human dignity".

Véronique Martin, Belgian Platform of Street Workers

ABOUT DYNAMO INTERNATIONAL – STREET WORKERS NETWORK

Dynamo International coordinates the **International Network of Street Social Workers** who work on the ground with people (children, young people, adults) living in street situations. The Network is currently made up of **48 national platforms** of street workers from countries of both the North and South. A real Network of solidarity, it is recognised as a European Anti-Poverty Network. It promotes sharing of practices, training, speaking out by grassroots workers, challenging political powers and other organisations in combating exclusion and inequality.

Approximately **4000** street social workers are represented within the Network through their member platforms. The 48 member platforms of the Network are made up of over **800** local and regional organisations of street workers in more than **290 towns or cities** and **150 regions**. The work of these Network members provides direct support to over **385,000 people living in street situations** and by virtue of this, over **1,540,000 parents, and community members** are indirectly impacted by these actions.

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