



Street Workers Network

## POLICY POSITION AND RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY DYNAMO INTERNATIONAL - STREET WORKERS NETWORK

FROM SOCIAL EXCLUSION TO SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR EVERYONE

### INTRODUCTION

**Dynamo International – Street Workers Network** is an international network of street social workers who work on the ground with people living and working on the streets. The network currently comprises close to 12,000 street social workers in 50 developing and developed countries.

Dynamo International is a truly socially-responsible network and seeks to play an active role in addressing poverty and social exclusion. The network facilitates the exchange of practices, training, grassroots stakeholders speaking out, and lobbying the authorities and other organisations involved in addressing exclusion and inequality. The network helps to make the voices heard of over a million people who live and work on the streets and are helped by our member street social workers on a daily basis in their living environments.

The *Social Protection for Everyone* campaign reflects street social workers' desire to ensure that all socially-excluded people can lead decent lives and to speak out against the barriers preventing them from doing so. The network is therefore joining forces with the Belgian campaign of the same name devised by CNCD-11.11.11 (National Centre for Development Cooperation) and its Flemish counterpart 11.11.11 and rolled out by a collective of Belgian non-governmental stakeholders.

### PRINCIPLE

Social protection encompasses **a coherent set of solidarity-based initiatives and structural measures** designed to ensure that each individual is protected against **social risks** throughout their life by providing sufficient income and access to basic services.

Social protection can cover a wide range of risks: illness, disability, old age, family/children, unemployment, housing etc.

### SOCIAL PROTECTION – A UNIVERSAL RIGHT

Regarded as a fundamental right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, social protection is also enshrined in several international and regional conventions and in many national constitutions.

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (articles 22 and 25).
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (articles 9 and 10).
- Convention 102 of the International Labour Organization (ILO): C102 - Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)
- International Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 3)

- 2013 Sustainable Development Goals (article 1 on poverty, article 5 on gender, and article 10 on inequality).
- European Social Charter (articles 12, 16, 17, 19 and 23).

States are duty-bound to **respect, protect and guarantee this right**. Citizens are rights holders and are not just simple beneficiaries.

ILO<sup>1</sup> convention 102 furthermore sets the **minimum social protection standards that each state must guarantee for its population**:

- ↳ Access to **medical care**.
- ↳ **Family benefits** for families with children (payments or in kind support).
- ↳ **Replacement income** during periods when people cannot / are no longer able to work – benefits in the event of an accident at work or occupational illness – sick pay – disability benefit – unemployment benefit – old-age benefits - maternity benefits (replacement income and appropriate medical care) – survivors' benefits.

The convention is supplemented by a recommendation (ILO recommendation 202<sup>2</sup>) on basic social security guarantees, i.e. a nationally-set minimum level of social security providing protection in order to prevent or reduce poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion.

### SOCIAL PROTECTION: A MEANS OF BRINGING ABOUT STRUCTURAL CHANGE<sup>3</sup>

However, at global level, only **27% of the population has access to comprehensive** social security systems, while the remaining 73% only has partial coverage or are not covered at all.

It is clear to see that inadequate or inexistent social protection **causes high and persistent levels of poverty and economic insecurity**, growing inequality and insufficient human capital investment. An incomplete social protection system is therefore a major barrier to a country's socio-economic development, irrespective of its income level.

If they lost their jobs, only 28% of workers worldwide would be able to claim benefits: 80% of workers in Europe, 38% in Latin America, 21% in the Middle East, 17% in Asia-Pacific and only 8% in Africa would receive benefits.

For instance, the stabilization of public finances and the **adjustment measures** put in place since 2010 and ramped up since 2014 **are compromising the effectiveness of the existing social protection systems in Europe**. The main repercussion has been a **drop in household incomes** and benefit cuts. **Child poverty increased in 19 out of 28 European countries** between 2007 and 2012.

Social protection is key to ensuring that children's rights are implemented in practice. A social protection system enables the vulnerability of families to be reduced by ensuring a regular income and thus guaranteeing the child's wellbeing.

<sup>1</sup> Convention 102 ILO - C102 - Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)

[http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID,P12100\\_LANG\\_CODE:312247,fr:NO](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID,P12100_LANG_CODE:312247,fr:NO)

<sup>2</sup> Recommendation 202 ILO - Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)

[http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID,P12100\\_LANG\\_CODE:3065524,fr:NO](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID,P12100_LANG_CODE:3065524,fr:NO)

<sup>3</sup> Social Protection for Everyone Campaign leaflet, 2015-2016 [www.protectionsociale.be](http://www.protectionsociale.be)

However, in times of crisis, appropriate social protection fosters a process of structural change in the economy through a **growth strategy focused on domestic demand**: it accelerates the recovery, stimulates productivity and stabilizes overall demand.

Effective social protection systems also foster peace and stability; **political stability and social cohesion** caused by the solidarity it arouses between the state and the country's population and within the population itself. Social protection reduces poverty and inequality by fairly redistributing wealth and fosters gender equality. Indeed, addressing the specific maternity-related loss of income risks (reduced working hours, maternity leave etc) fosters greater equality. For all these reasons, social protection is also a development priority for low-income countries. Social protection helps to promote human development, political stability and inclusive development. Moreover, a 2008 ILO study found that it is a **profitable, feasible and even affordable investment** (simulations to calculate the relative cost of social protection measures).

90% of the population in **low-income countries** are not entitled to any healthcare.

More recent initiatives in countries such as Indonesia, Bolivia and Brazil demonstrate that not only is it possible to expand the existing social protection system regardless of the country's development level, but that such a system is also a powerful means of leveraging economic and human development. Each and every citizen is able to take part in the country's economic and social life and the whole of society benefits when social protection systems reduce inequality, increase purchasing power and guarantee access to healthcare. (Examples include China – an almost universal pension, and Brazil – extended coverage and an increased minimum wage). They are most definitely examples for us all to follow.

#### THE REALITY ON THE STREETS

Vulnerable people and people living in extreme poverty are often marginalized because of their limited involvement in the wider community. They have few alternatives and often feel that the **streets are the best (or the least bad) way of keeping their heads above water**. There are many reasons why someone ends up living on the streets. Poor social security and protection policies are one of the root causes.

The social, political and economic circumstances in the past few years seem to be increasingly **reducing the problem of people living and working on the streets to an issue of responsibility or individual choice rather than a public responsibility**. In most countries, there are no relevant governmental or budgetary policies aimed specifically at people living and working on the streets. The other end of the spectrum of perceptions involves the public authorities frequently **criminalizing poverty**. **Street social workers** often **witness first-hand** situations which are continuing to deteriorate, notably as a result of the austerity policies implemented by European governments or a lack of attention by the authorities in many countries.

In accordance with the general principles of human rights, street social work endeavours to **protect and give the most vulnerable people the means to protect themselves**. As part of their work providing a listening ear and supporting people, street social workers seek out distinct and personalized solutions appropriate to the life stories, **unique characteristics** and specific needs of the individual.

**Street social workers are often the only people in direct contact with those living and working on the streets. In some cases, they are the first and last link in the chain of education and social support, when all the other bodies have failed.** However, their role is to act as intermediaries and not to replace the institutions.

**Street social workers therefore play a key role with the general public and policymakers with regard to violations of the rights that should be safeguarded for each and every human being, whatever their economic, social or cultural situation. Street outreach work should be regarded as a real investment in social action in general and as prevention work.**

## THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF STREET SOCIAL WORKERS' POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are the result of a consultation and highlight the network's grassroots experience of poverty alleviation policies.<sup>4</sup>

As previously stated, **as well as being a fundamental right, social protection is a means of leveraging economic and human development** and a real asset when endeavouring to build a stable society. The **social solidarity** that it generates is the best way to combat poverty.

The situation is alarming: it is no longer just individuals who have to contend with poverty and social exclusion; increasingly entire families have to cope with precarious circumstances. In some cases, **poverty** is a legacy handed down the generations, becoming a **true political and human scandal**.

States and civil society therefore have the **collective/shared duty**, even in tough economic times, to keep focusing on social protection for everyone in order to maintain its role as an economic buffer.

Despite the commitment displayed by certain authorities, grassroots associations are deeply concerned **about the lack of real proactive public policies** designed to help vulnerable population groups such as street children and education system dropouts, unemployed young people, drug users, prison leavers, the victims of abuse and domestic abuse.

There is a link between this observation and a certain level of State withdrawal from social issues, notably by delegating authority in this area to local government, to local councils who must set their own priorities and strategies for the long term, and the sharing out of responsibility between the State and regional government (this is happening in the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands etc).<sup>5</sup>

**Dynamo International – Street Workers Network is calling for States to adopt a social protection system that is equally accessible to all without discrimination and which fulfils the following criteria:**

### CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND CONSULTATION

- **Social protection policies should be developed in consultation with all the relevant stakeholders:** policymakers, institutional and socio-professional representatives (state, local and regional government, public institutions, grassroots associations) in order to take advantage of their expertise and find out their opinions, understand and reach an agreement with them, with a view to working in partnership.
- Particular attention needs to be paid to **working in partnership with networks of grassroots stakeholders and young people** due to their outreach work which enables them to reach the target populations and give them a voice.
- **The active participation of vulnerable groups in community life and the decision-making process should be encouraged** in order to foster inclusive development. Indeed, development cannot truly reduce poverty unless all groups help to create opportunities, share the benefits of development and take part in decision-making.<sup>6</sup>

### INTEGRATED POLICIES AND SOCIALLY-RESPONSIBLE TAXATION

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4 Recommendations on alleviating poverty and social exclusion made by street social workers, recommendation 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Words Forum, organized by Dynamo International, Brussels, 26-30 October 2010.

5 In the Czech Republic, the State is responsible for benefits and the local councils are tasked with outreach work.

6 UNDP: [http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/focus\\_areas/focus\\_inclusive\\_development](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/focus_areas/focus_inclusive_development)

- **All States should have a formal social protection system which is accessible to everyone** without discrimination in order to guarantee this fundamental right to their populations (Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).
- **Develop common financial and social policies at the supranational level**  
A **robust and binding strategy** needs to be put in place for the States so that social protection is finally placed at the heart of social and economic policy.

#### INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

- Apply the principle of **individual entitlement** to social policy: social protection measures should focus on individual needs, deliver appropriate solutions for the most socially-excluded people and be applied without any discriminatory conditions of access<sup>7</sup> and guilt-inducing factors. Poverty and diversity are not reprehensible!

#### COMBATING CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

- **Child benefit** should be granted by the State for any family with at least one child so that it covers children's minimum requirements and enables people to live decently. Each and every person, irrespective of their social status, should benefit from the financial resources needed for a **decent and fulfilling life** which includes **access to culture, leisure, education, mobility, wellbeing activities and social relationships**. Benefit amounts should not lead to children and families being isolated. States are duty bound to ensure that people have a secure existence. In this respect, it is unacceptable that people living in poverty and their children are restricted to simply coping with everyday issues (paying bills, housing, filling the fridge with food, accessing healthcare).
- Consequently, **low incomes and benefits should be increased so that they exceed the national poverty threshold**. An appropriate fixed income would help to reduce this source of constant stress.

**Improve access to childcare** in order to help women to enter the labour market and address the issue of gender inequality.

#### DYNAMO INTERNATIONAL IS ALSO SUPPORTING THE BELGIAN 11.11.11 CAMPAIGN<sup>8</sup>

- **Enshrine the right to social protection in laws and treaties** Many countries have adopted international conventions on social protection but the full application of all of these principles in all the countries is far from being a reality. Universal social protection must also be explicitly included in global sustainable development goals and development cooperation targets in each of the countries.
- **Guarantee sustainable and socially-responsible funding for universal social protection** States are able to release enough resources to implement robust social protection systems. This involves helping developing countries to more efficiently collect taxes and develop effective social security systems, and also by making a serious commitment to fair taxation worldwide. Finally, governments should work to develop and finance an international system to fund social protection.
- **Support the involvement of social stakeholders in developing social protection at international level** Trade unions, mutual funds, small farmers' organisations, small independent players and other social movements are best placed to identify the problems faced by people with no access to social protection. These movements take initiatives and develop their own forms of social protection in settings in which governments fail to do their duty. Governments should therefore include them in their social protection policies.

<sup>7</sup> The EU works to protect its citizens against any discrimination based on race or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender.

<sup>8</sup> Social Protection for Everyone Campaign leaflet, 2015-2016 [www.protectionsociale.be](http://www.protectionsociale.be)

- **Pursue a coherent policy to bolster social protection at the European and international levels**  
 Politicians need to ensure that their policies bolster social protection. They need to lobby actively for a European pact based on the upwards harmonisation of the different European social protection systems. Finally, they need to ensure that international trade and investment agreements, tax treaties and the international financial institutions do not water down and do not prevent progress being made on social protection.

**Given the urgency of the situation, social protection must be a priority on the political agenda.**

**The current crisis highlights the interdependence of the economic systems and the importance of countries coordinating policy. Although various policy instruments are in place, efforts to support the most vulnerable people need to be continued so that a humane and socially-responsible society becomes a reality for everyone.**

#### STREET WORDS: REAL LIFE TESTIMONIES

“The so-called street children, who moreover are vulnerable, are neglected and are deprived of their rights not just by their parents, but also by the political and administrative and judicial authorities, with regard to their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. X is a 13 year old girl. Her parents believed she was a witch when she was a baby. They decided to throw her into the river and placed her in a bag in order to do so. She reached the sixth year of primary school. X has been living on the streets for over three years and has to fend for herself. She is the victim of all sorts of violence. She has to undertake sex work in order to survive and sleeps out in the open with her friends. Economic, social and cultural rights are a myth and not a reality for her and the other children living on the streets of Kinshasa.”

*EDHO MUKENDI KAFUNDA and PHERA NSANGA TSHIDIADIA, Congolese Platform of Street Social Workers*

“(…) We work with young people who have grown up on the streets or in institutions. They have problems with their ID card because Bulgarian law stipulates that you need an address in order to obtain ID documents. Consequently, the homeless cannot obtain documents if they are unable to provide an address. Young people who have grown up in institutions tend to obtain their first ID card using the institution’s address but they are unable to renew it when the card expires if they have no permanent accommodation and therefore no address. This is also an issue for members of the Roma community who live in illegal accommodation and cannot prove ownership of it. They are unable to obtain an ID card, meaning that they are not entitled to claim benefits for their children, to alleviate poverty etc. Moreover, in Bulgaria, the police are entitled to detain you for 24 hours if you have no ID card. It’s a never-ending vicious circle.”

*Ulyana Matveeva, Bulgarian Platform of Street Social Workers*

“I am fond of this girl, I worry about her, and I worry with her when she enrolls at school after six months spent on the streets and in squats. Her reality is so far removed from the ‘sterilized norm’. I reassure her, she has the ability but I don’t lie to her about how things are, aware of the fact that she is socially excluded and incompatible with institutional life. She is a big shot on the streets but in her eyes I see a little girl asking me for support. In this world, she looks to me to reassure her about her right to exist.”

*Anne-Lise Marchesani, Belgian Platform of Street Social Workers*

“All the work done to reintegrate him was in vain. We were constantly rebuffed. However, he says that we are his only family and he would be lost without us. He regularly talked of taking his own life. We managed to dissuade him but he then said he preferred prison and he would do everything he could to get put inside. There was radio silence during the first three months of his jail term as he was not entitled to make phone calls during that period. The first call he made from prison was to our centre and we remain his sole contact outside the prison walls. He calls us regularly to stay in touch with us. He has now been in prison for six months and our non-profit has just obtained permission to visit him in prison.”

*Jean-Philippe Lagoda, Belgian Platform of Street Social Workers*

“S is a 13 year old Bulgarian (…). He is a newcomer (…) and does not attend school (…). Having talked to his parents, we realized that this family is highly vulnerable and that consequently the children’s education was not a priority (…). When we did the rounds of the neighbourhood, we reminded him of the importance of going to school and the impact that a failure

to attend school could have on his future prospects: illiteracy, no qualifications, increased risk of being unable to find a job (...). Our struggle to find a school that would take these children well into the academic year then began, even though schools are legally obliged to enrol any child whatever their administrative status. S' family have just been evicted from their 'accommodation' (...) they were not rehoused and since the eviction we haven't heard from S or his family. Isn't the Belgian State supposed to give children the same opportunities and rights, whatever their administrative status? For these specific children and many others who use our service, this manifestly isn't the case!"

*Gaëtan Pierard, Belgian Platform of Street Social Workers*

"He left prison this morning and wandered around all day before returning 'home' this evening to this neighbourhood which witnessed his life story. Has he really any other 'home'? I feel that he is stressed and an excess of violence is bubbling away inside of him, the violence resulting from being thrown out onto the streets without money and prospects. Another meeting with a 'clean' young person as he would say and it's important for him. He talks about himself, his girlfriends, his children, his problems and his desire to move on but after undertaking training for a year, he can't get a job, but he says that he will stick at it! I do the last round of the neighbourhood and have a last chat at 2am. A partnership between a street social worker and the people she works with in response to a system whose failings produce unacceptable situations which violate human dignity."

*Véronique Martin, Belgian Platform of Street Social Workers*

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