

EUROPEAN
FILE



The Community's
battle against
social exclusion

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Poverty is still with us, albeit in a form which has changed radically over the last 15 years. The growth in long-term unemployment, urban unrest, the resurgent problem of homelessness and the campaigns led by non-governmental organizations have all served to generate debate on the 'new poverty' and social exclusion.¹

Poverty is a complex, heterogeneous phenomenon and cannot be defined solely in terms of low income levels. As many studies have shown, the deprivation suffered by the poorest classes extends to many fields — employment, housing, health, education, social life, etc. The European Community and several of its Member States now consequently tend to define poverty in terms of 'social exclusion', a definition which encompasses both the processes of exclusion and the resultant situations. It also serves to emphasize the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon and the multiplicity and diversity of the factors which combine to exclude individuals, groups or even regions from those exchanges, activities and social rights which are an inherent part of social integration.

What about figures? There are no satisfactory statistics depicting the scale and growth of social exclusion. Research in the field of low incomes suggests that poverty increased during the 1970s before stabilizing at a high level in the 1980s. The latest available calculations (relating to 1985, which is already several years past) indicated that 50 million people were living in households with an income of less than half the average for their country. Fifty million is 15% of the Community's population.

These figures suffice to demonstrate the scale of the problem. But they are only a rough and ready guide, given the very wide range of situations — the often long-lasting marginalization of the homeless, the difficult living conditions of the social groups most affected by unemployment, especially in rundown urban areas with immigrant populations, the traditional poverty to be found in rural areas lagging behind in development, etc.

The main causes of the present forms of social exclusion are:

- the situation of the employment market, and particularly the expansion of long-term unemployment and insecure forms of employment;
- changes in family structures with, in particular, greater numbers of people living alone and of single-parent families;
- the mechanisms by means of which social policies (and more generally the action taken by the public authorities) are adapted to such developments and changes.

The fact that some social exclusion factors are likely to intensify means that greater attention must be paid to the problem: current employment growth prospects are not good enough to deal with the unemployment rates, migratory pressure is tending to rise, the current process of economic restructuring and

¹ This replaces No 4/87. Manuscript completed in June 1992.

technological change is generating disparities between the development levels of different regions and making the situation of some industries look highly precarious, and urban unrest is becoming a permanent feature of the social scene.

An imperative: a Europe of solidarity

Social exclusion is an immense challenge to the Member States but also to the Community itself. The Community cannot avoid being concerned about situations which, by their existence and magnitude, signal the need for a balanced process of European integration — a Europe which is not merely a large single market but a Community of Member States and citizens espousing shared values, particularly social justice.

Admittedly, it is first and foremost for the Member States and their national, regional and local authorities to combat social exclusion, for they are the guarantors of solidarity and social cohesion within their respective boundaries. Under what has come to be known as the principle of subsidiarity, the European Community cannot take the place of the Member States in this respect.

However, it is also clear that the furtherance of a social Europe forms an integral part of the great project of European integration and that the Community must give practical expression to the values of solidarity in an effort to assist its most deprived citizens. The Community cannot be satisfied with a 'two-speed society', breeding, as it would, poverty, exclusion and frustration. The single frontier-free market and monetary union constitute growth factors for Europe as a whole, but they are also risk factors for the weakest regions and social groups and must be accompanied by more dynamic policies in the field of economic and social cohesion. It is in this spirit that the Community is striving to strengthen its social dimension, reduce development disparities between regions, promote the improvement of living and working conditions and intensify solidarity with the most deprived sections of the population.

In this respect, the Community can and must supplement and stimulate the action taken by the Member States to combat social exclusion by fostering the exchange of information, the comparison of experience and the transfer of know-how, by stimulating public debate and greater awareness amongst policy-makers and the general public of the need for greater and more effective action and by giving as much support as it can to practical action on the ground as close as possible to the actual situations and local reality.

to the current process of change. It can help regions in difficulty so as to reduce development disparities within Europe. And it can see to it that the Community's own policies do not themselves generate social exclusion.

Community action

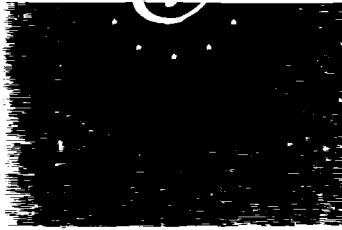
Hitherto, the Community has not had the powers or means to conduct policies on a scale commensurate with the problems confronting it. Community action has been and still is limited. None the less it betokens a definite political resolve.

- Community action with regard to poverty and social exclusion is primarily indirect.
 - The Community's general economic and social policy can help to establish conditions which are more propitious to the fight against social exclusion, more particularly by promoting job creation, better working conditions, equal treatment of men and women and equal treatment of national and migrant workers. The Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers and the various directives or recommendations proposed to implement it are an effective illustration of these efforts, though a great deal remains to be done before their tangible effects are felt.
 - The Community also acts via its structural Funds (European Regional Development Fund — ERDF; European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund — EAGGF; European Social Fund — ESF) which provide significant financial support for the development of the disadvantaged regions and the integration into working life of those categories who are the most vulnerable in employment terms — more especially young people and the long-term unemployed.

However, the activities of the structural Funds do not directly concern the most disadvantaged groups and are not always as accessible to them as they should be. For example, the employment-promotion measures supported by the ESF seldom include the 'upstream' or flanking measures which the poorest groups need — literacy campaigns, personalized support, assistance in asserting rights, housing and health services, etc. Likewise, the most deprived urban areas — with their combination of segregation, inter-ethnic tension and even violence — are often located in regions which do not qualify for ERDF aid.

To overcome some of these shortcomings, the Commission has set up support schemes for structural Fund pilot projects, the main examples being the Leader programme for rural development, the Horizon and NOW programmes operated under the ESF for deprived or handicapped groups and for women and the urban area regeneration programme set up under the ERDF.

- The Community also takes specific action through a range of measures that have been diversifying over the years.
 - Specific action began at the start of the 1970s with the first 'European programme to combat poverty' (1975-80). Operating on a modest budget



'Poverty 3' is the Community programme for the economic and social integration of the most disadvantaged sections of the population. It is intended to stimulate the initiatives and policies conducted in the Member States by promoting innovation, the transfer of know-how and public debate on social exclusion.

The five-year programme (1989-94) extends and enlarges on the previous Community initiatives — the first and second European programmes to combat poverty (1975-80 and 1984-88). However, it is more ambitious than its forerunners in that it lays stress on partnership, the involvement of those concerned and a multidimensional approach to social exclusion and focuses resources (ECU 55 million) on some 40 pilot projects operated as a single dynamic group under European guidance. The programme also finances various statistical studies and research work seeking to improve understanding of the processes of social exclusion.

'Poverty 3' is implemented by the Commission of the European Communities, Directorate-General V (Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs), Division V/C/1 (Social security and social action programmes; Mrs Odile Quintin, Head of Division).

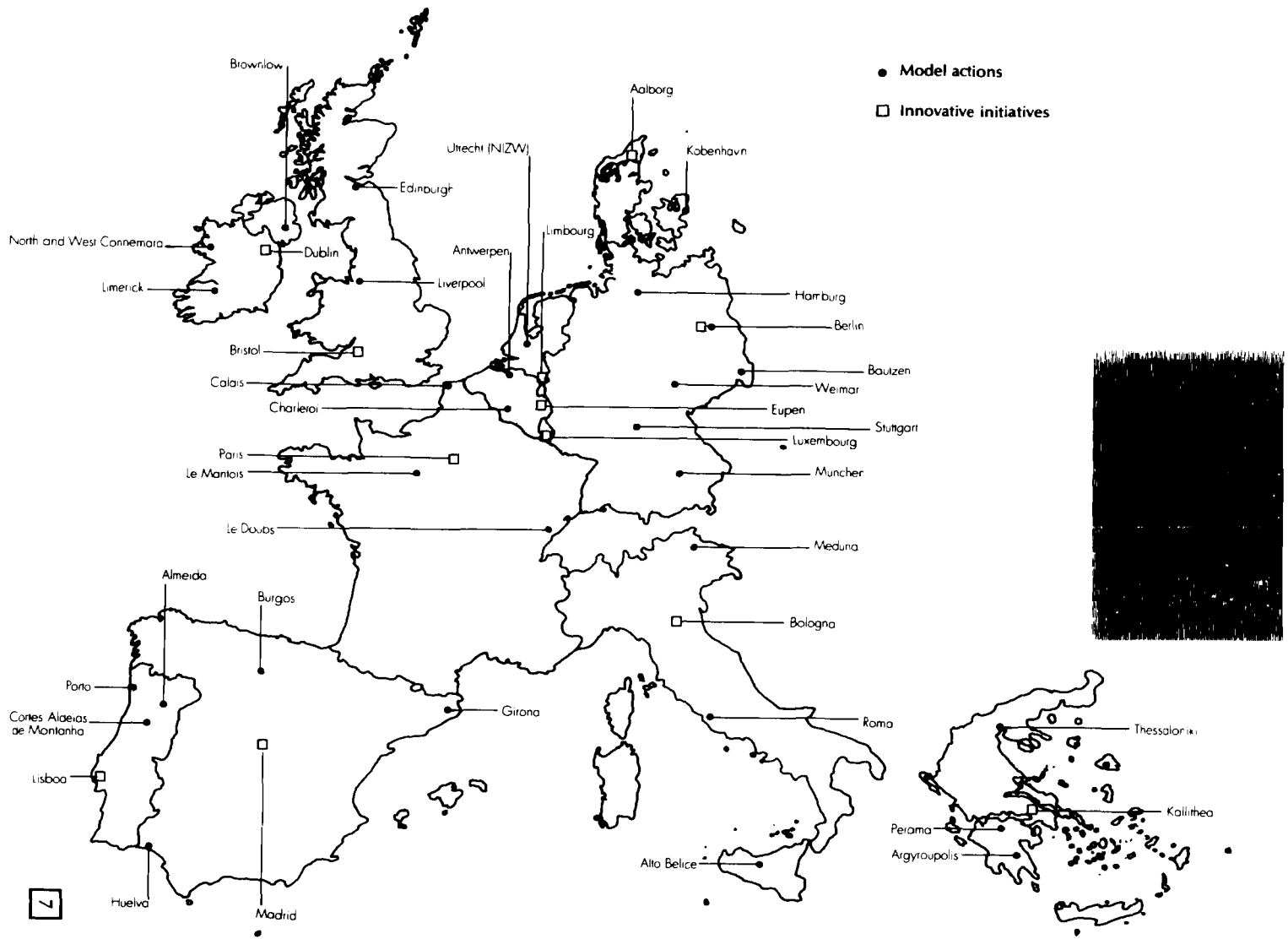
The Commission is assisted in its work by an Advisory Committee consisting of a representative of the government of each Member State.

The programme began with 39 projects: 27 'model actions' experimenting at local level with coherent strategies for combating social exclusion and 12 'innovative initiatives' exploring appropriate responses to specific forms of social exclusion. Following German unification, three model actions located in the new *Länder* were added to the 39 initial projects.

An international team of consultants provides the Commission with technical assistance in the management, evaluation and organization of the programme. The team meets under the aegis of 'Animation et recherche', a European Economic Interest Grouping, and coordinates a network of research and development units, whose members provide technical support for the projects in each country or group of countries.

The programme publishes a news-sheet (EN/FR, 10 issues a year), a magazine (EN/DE/FR/IT/ES, three issues a year), a repertory of projects (EN/FR) and various reports on the implementation of 'Poverty 3' and the results of its international meetings. These publications are available from: GEIE A & R, 60 rue Jacquemars Gielée, F-59800 Lille.

Contact: Commission of the European Communities, Division V/C/1, 200 rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels.



(ECU 20 million¹), this programme consisted mainly in supporting some 30 pilot projects spread over the then nine countries of the Community. A second specific programme was subsequently set up (1985-89) with a slightly bigger budget (ECU 29 million for four years) now spread over 12 Member States. Under this programme, support was provided for some 90 local projects by automatically making them part of a process of transnational exchange. This programme was followed immediately by a third (1989-94) programme with more ambitious contents and resources (ECU 55 million). Entitled 'Poverty 3', the programme focuses its resources on some 40 pilot projects with the intention of moving on from a phase based on exploratory work and micro-projects to one of 'life-sized' experimentation with large-scale projects.

These programmes have long served as the principal, though not the sole, instrument of specific action by the Community. They remain modest and could obviously not claim to solve the problems of poverty in Europe on their own. Their function is of a totally different nature: they are an expression of political determination, a resolve to promote experimentation and innovation and to encourage the measures taken in the Member States by demonstrating the value of projects based in particular on partnership. Hence the importance attached to continuous assessment of the measures carried out.

- Specific Community activities have also become more diversified and more coherent.

Firstly diversification: the specific programmes have been followed by other initiatives. For example, since 1987 the Community has been distributing food surpluses as a way of contributing to the winter campaigns of assistance for the poorest sections of the population, organized mostly by non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, cooperation with the non-governmental organizations engaged in combating poverty has been intensified and the Commission has helped to unite them in the European Anti-Poverty Network with which it has set up a permanent dialogue. Lastly, on 24 June 1992, the Council adopted a Recommendation proposed by the Commission relating to the recognition in all Member States of a right to sufficient resources ('minimum income'). The Recommendation is not binding but it does constitute a legal and political instrument, and it means that Community action has moved on from supporting a small number of local projects to influencing the basic philosophy of national social protection schemes.

While becoming more ambitious, the Community effort has also become gradually more coherent. To achieve such coherence, the various initiatives taken at Community, national, regional and local level, generally in dispersed order, need to be brought within a single synergetic framework. The completion of a number of studies, the establishment of an 'observatory' of policies for combating social exclusion and the organization of periodic meetings have made it possible to give structure to the networks of

¹ ECU 1 = approximately UKL 0.70, IRL 0.77 and USD 1.34 on the basis of the exchange rates on 31.7.1992.

European bodies involved and thus engender a common approach to the problems. By bringing together non-governmental organizations, experts and elected bodies as well as representatives of the two sides of industry and the local and national authorities, these meetings and networks also serve to publicize Community action at all levels. Furthermore, the Commission has set up an interdepartmental working party between all those of its Directorates-General which can contribute in any way to the fight against social exclusion.

Towards an intensification of efforts

At the Maastricht European Council, an agreement on social policy was signed by 11 Member States and annexed to the new Treaty on European Union. For the first time, this agreement emphasizes that the fight against exclusion is one of the social policy objectives of the European Union. It makes provision for Community action to support and amplify the activities of the Member States to this effect by means of measures aimed mainly at the integration of those who are excluded from the employment market. It also makes provision for the Council to adopt some of these measures by a qualified majority.

A declaration inviting the Community to cooperate with solidarity organizations was also signed at Maastricht.

This means that the new Treaty opens up prospects for the intensification of Community efforts to combat social exclusion.

Just how these efforts are to be intensified remains to be determined. The European Commission has launched a great debate with the various bodies active in the field.

At the end of 1992, the Commission will present a document setting out policy guidelines and proposals based on the following objectives: progress in recognition of the rights of the poorest, a greater contribution from the structural Funds to combat social exclusion, drafting of a new and more ambitious specific programme, and development of cooperation with the Member States and non-governmental organizations.

New dynamism has thus been imparted to Community action. Above all, a new impetus has been given to galvanize the efforts of all those who are actively involved. If combating social exclusion depends first and foremost on the initiatives taken in the Member States, it is essential that such initiatives expand and that the Community continue to stimulate and harness efforts on all sides.





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