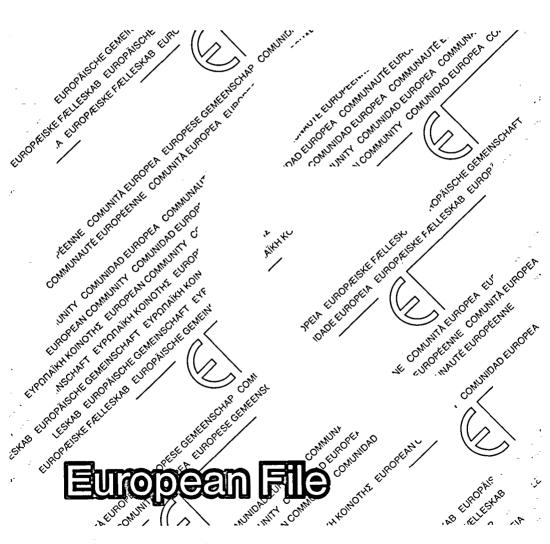
The Community combats poverty



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The fourth world', 'the new poor' ... Terms to denote those excluded by industrialized society have multiplied in recent years, as has action to assist them. Examples are the 'restaurants of the heart' and food banks which have been recently set up in several European Community countries: signs not only of a pricked conscience but also of the extent of the problem and the need to do something to remedy it. The Community is involved in this fight. In addition to its regional policy which supports the development of disadvantaged areas, to its Social Fund which co-finances vocational training and recruitment assistance operations, and to other more recently launched activities such as local employment initiatives or the fight against illiteracy, the Community now has a second programme specifically to combat poverty. ¹

The old and new faces of poverty

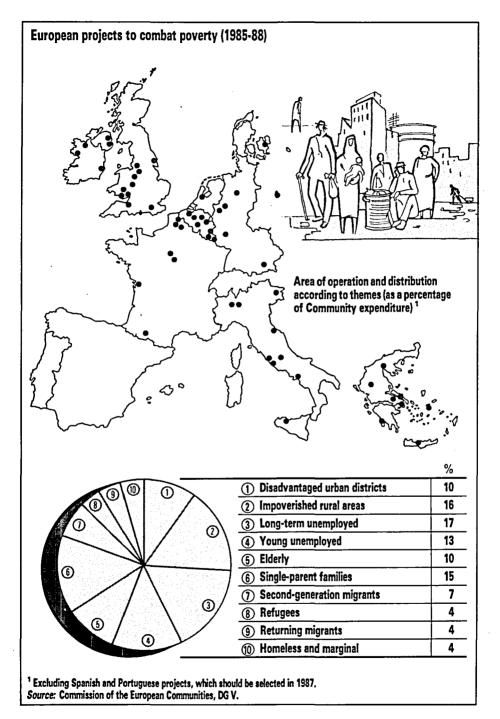
Poverty, which assumes past and future misfortune, is difficult to define and even more difficult to quantify. In 1984, European Community ministers defined it as follows: 'the poor shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member State in which they live'. The lack of any more precise common criteria means that it is not possible at the moment to measure realistically the number of poor people living in Community countries. In the middle of the 1970s, an estimate of 30 million (approximately 10% of the population) was arrived at, by considering as poor anybody who did not have half the average income for his own particular country. This figure certainly needs to be increased as a result of the upheavals caused by the economic crisis, income stagnation, industrial restructuring and technological progress.

Social development enables a distinction to be made between two kinds of poverty:

Traditional poverty, which affects several under-developed European areas, an
underclass composed above all of unskilled workers and immigrants, and many
people in particularly vulnerable categories such as unmarried mothers, the
elderly, the disabled, the handicapped, nomads, tramps etc.: in short, all those
left behind in the wake of the economic growth of the 1960s. The social,
economic and cultural disadvantages of most of these categories tend to
accumulate: low income or lack of work, illiteracy or lack of training, bad living,
housing or health conditions.

□ New types of poverty. Born out of the recession and economic and social change, this 'new poverty' seems to follow a different logic. It is caused by a sudden alteration in previously acceptable living conditions and affects the 'average person' who falls into a precarious and then distressful situation when insufficient resources have to cope with a misfortune such as unemployment or sickness. Faced with this growing mass of persons in difficulty, social security

¹ This file replaces our No 11/82.



systems appear all the more unable to help, as their funds have had to be limited and they were designed to tackle (with mixed results) the problems of an underclass or 'fourth world' which was relatively stable and identifiable.

In any case, the employment and labour market situation clearly plays a key role in the causes of poverty and in providing a remedy. Unemployment (in particular, long-term unemployment which affects a growing number of Europeans), employment uncertainty, low salaries and the increased incidence of precarious, temporary, part-time work etc., are all causes of poverty. It is clear that current changes disproportionately affect certain groups: unskilled workers, second generation immigrants, the handicapped, and also women and young people (in the Community, the unemployment rate for those under 25 years is twice that for adults). Other groups that are currently especially vulnerable include political refugees, 'returning migrants' (workers who return to their native country having emigrated from it in better times) and single parent families, whose number is increasing with the rise in divorces and births outside marriage. In this last category, the economic crisis plays a part, but so also does a change in family structure and behaviour.

The second Community programme: origin and operation

National governments and numerous non-governmental organizations have been active for a long time in combating poverty and its different elements. The Community too has played its part:

- ☐ The persistence of poverty or even of a precarious work situation is incompatible with several key objectives of the European Treaties: to promote a harmonized development of economic activity throughout the Community, continuous and balanced expansion, increased stability, and an accelerated improvement in living standards. A people's Europe should be a Europe of solidarity, especially as regards the most underprivileged.
- ☐ The Community is in a position to encourage exchanges of experience and the dissemination of innovatory procedures from one Member State to another. This increases the effectiveness of national action, while continuing the search for a more coherent and global policy to reduce poverty in Europe.

Between 1975 and 1980, a first European programme to combat poverty financed a series of transnational studies and some 50 local pilot projects. This enabled a more accurate assessment to be made of the dimensions of the problem and provided not inconsiderable assistance to the individuals affected by the projects.

When this particular operation came to an end, both the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament emphasized the need to begin specific and concrete activities, based on the joint themes of research and innovation. Throughout 1983, the European Commission consulted widely with public and private authorities involved with poverty problems. A consensus was thereby arrived at on the themes

and population groups in need of priority action in the framework of a new European programme. This consensus helped the Council of Ministers to adopt, on 19 December 1984, a new programme of specific Community action to combat poverty. It covers the period 1985-88 and has an allocation of 29 million ECU. The programme is a coherent whole centred on the following three aspects:

Assistance to carry out action-research projects to test and perfect new methods of helping the poor or those threatened by poverty. As far as is possible, these projects must be run with the participation of the persons concerned. The projects must also be of particular interest for the Community in answering problems common to several Member States.
The dissemination and exchange of knowledge, the coordination and evaluation of operations to combat poverty, and the transfer of innovatory methods between Member States.
The dissemination and regular exchange of comparable data on poverty in the Community.

65 concrete projects form the basis of the Community programme. These were selected in September 1985 and in February 1986 from among those proposed by public or private organizations and submitted by the Community Member States. They may be called 'action-research' projects in that they combine field work intended to illuminate a specific problem and continuous research on the assistance process, particularly as regards evaluating its operational impact. The selected projects are financed by the Community to a maximum of 50 or 55% of their total cost and can be divided into 10 transnational groups, according to their priority objectives. The first two groups concern geographical areas where there are integrated operations involving several categories of the poor; the other eight are aimed more particularly at one or other of these categories, which were identified following the wide-ranging consultation undertaken by the Commission.

Among the selected projects, 9 give priority to disadvantaged urban areas, 11 to impoverished rural areas, 10 to the long-term unemployed, 5 to the young unemployed, 7 to the elderly, 8 to single parent families, 5 to second-generation migrants, 2 to refugees, 4 to returned migrants and 4 to the homeless and marginal. The distribution of projects by country is as follows: Belgium: 6 projects; Denmark: 2; Germany: 6; Greece: 7; France: 7; Ireland: 9; Italy: 9; Luxembourg: 3; Netherlands: 1; United Kingdom: 15. In addition, 12 projects should shortly be financed in Spain and in Portugal.

The dissemination, coordination, evaluation and transfer of innovatory methods is undertaken by a special service which was established for this purpose, at the request of the European Commission. It was set up by university research institutes and is

¹ 1 ECU (European Currency Unit) = about £ 0.73, Ir£ 0.76 or US \$ 1.07 (at exchange rates current on 8 January 1987).

composed of independent experts from all Community countries. It encourages exchanges of experience and methods (in the field rather than through scholarly reports) between projects on a similar theme carried out in several countries. There are seminars, workshops, transnational visits and other joint activities to enable the leaders of the various project groups, to come together regularly and to be joined by authorities, social workers and researchers not involved with the European programme. The service also supplies follow-up and continuous evaluation of projects to assess their impact, to encourage practical training and to maximize the innovatory potential of the different parts of the programme. In addition, it disseminates results which have been obtained, notably through the medium of a weekly publication. This is to ensure that information does not remain confined to a small circle of project authorities but reaches, throughout the Community and as the programme proceeds, all those engaged in combating poverty, whether they are part of the Community programme or not. \(^1\)

Furthermore, to encourage the dissemination of comparable data on poverty and, thereby, a better understanding and perception of the dimensions of the problem, the European Commission has asked a separate university research institute to draw up a broad range of statistical series and social indicators to ensure a full assessment is made of the phenomena of poverty and their various aspects. This work is carried out in close collaboration with the statistical services of the Commission and the Member States.

A broad range of objectives

Before mentioning several concrete examples, here is some additional information on the objectives of the different European project groups:

- ☐ Disadvantaged urban districts. Integrated action to regenerate certain areas in our cities. Account is taken of all aspects of the urban environment: employment/unemployment, housing, education, culture, social life ... Selected projects are aimed at:
 - Promoting concerted action, participation and cooperation between the urban population and the various services, in order to foster more regular contacts.
 - The improvement of physical, social and communal conditions in underprivileged districts.
 - The reintegration into urban society of 'marginal' populations.
- ☐ Impoverished rural areas. Apart from having a high incidence of socio-economic problems (poor health, low incomes, precarious housing conditions ...), residents of impoverished rural areas have a tendancy to become marginalized, to

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develop an apathetic attitude and to lose a sense of initiative and cultural identity. In the future, action must be based on an integrated approach to local community development and aim to involve the official social services in the socio-cultural development of the whole community. The objective is to:

- Promote a model of community development whereby local resources are managed with the active participation of the population concerned.
- Create local groups or structures charged with promoting regular contact with the authorities, to ensure that local action is not isolated or marginal.
- Provide for cultural development by exploiting the positive aspects of the local culture and enriching it with new elements.
- ☐ The long-term unemployed and the young unemployed. The Community's specific action applies to the unemployed who fall into poverty through insufficiency or lack of training, of social protection or of resources. Community development is obviously an essential tool in this strategy. Taking into account European Social Fund assistance for training and recruitment assistance, the programme to combat poverty gives priority to projects where the primary objective is to prevent any further deterioration in the situation of these unemployed people. These projects may deal with:
 - The development of existing services, for example in the field of information and counselling.
 - The establishment of meeting and leisure venues, to develop mutual aid and self-reliance among the unemployed.
 - The creation of a new kind of organization working in close collaboration with the other relevant services and helping to find solutions to everyday problems: housing, hire purchase, budget, child care ...
 - The identification and promotion of new forms of social integration not necessarily linked with vocational status.
- ☐ The elderly. The European Commission hopes that any project falling under one or other of the sub-themes will seek to ensure that where there are cooperatives of the young unemployed, these provide some services for elderly people. Projects specifically aimed at this population category deal with the following points:
 - Education and recreation. The elderly, whose skills and talents are underestimated and underexploited, must be encouraged to meet in centres where they can be introduced to new educational and recreational opportunities and encouraged to teach their own special skills.

¹ See European file, No 19/86: 'The European Social Fund'.

•	the elderly poor to remain as long as possible in their own homes or, when they have to enter a residential institution, to maintain contact with their environment.
•	Housing. The elderly poor must be given the means to resist pressure to leave their own homes. This implies maintaining, improving and adapting their dwellings, installing telephone lines, promoting experiments in group living, etc.
fac	ingle parent families. The provision of shelter, counselling and child-care cilities to help single parents (including fathers) who have insufficient re- urces. Priority goes to:
•	The creation of child care and resource facilities. These must be designed to encourage parent participation, thereby creating a favourable environment for the development of local self-help networks.
•	The provision of counselling and guidance facilities which could assist parents, (particularly at a time of separation or divorce).
•	Solutions for other problems of everyday life, particularly the organization of group courses to teach people how to live in reduced circumstances.
re in	econd generation migrants. The Commission gives priority to projects which inforce the practical efficacity of the European Community Directive concernge the education of children of migrant workers. The main issues are the llowing:
•	Information and counselling: specialized centres to assist migrants must concentrate on providing information on legal rights, particularly as regards social assistance, and on providing advice regarding pre-school education.
0	Education of children: this involves encouraging nursery schools to be set up in order to improve the integration of young children into the society and environment of the host country.
fac co in as	refugees and returning migrants. The most acute problem that these categories ce is unemployment. Taking account of European Social Fund activities, the embat poverty programme concentrates on projects which aim to stimulate dependent entrepreneurship as well as education and information: providing sistants to teach the local language advice on training and the availability of cial benefits, etc.

☐ Marginals. This category includes minorities such as gypsies, nomads, travellers, tramps, the homeless, drop-outs and all those who, voluntarily or otherwise, live outside the social security net (the list is not exhaustive). Pilot schemes in support of these groups are very recent and still of an experimental nature.

Th	ese are examples of projects supported by the European Community:
	Integrated urban project at Molenbeek-Saint-Jean (Belgium). The organization 'La Porte Ouverte' provides a multipurpose social centre, which includes training and recreational services and a restaurant, for the benefit of neighbourhoods that are becoming marginalized or are marked by an increasing concentration of migrants, refugees or elderly people. This project is also intended to help people to improve their housing conditions, especially heating facilities.
	Improving the situation of the long-term unemployed in Belfast (United Kingdom). The Belfast Unemployment Centre runs training programmes and provides support for the establishment of independent cooperatives which organize activities to stimulate the creation of new jobs. The essential objective is to change the attitude of the unemployed towards themselves, their situation and their environment.
	Assistance for the young unemployed at Mainz (Germany). The town's Sozial-pädagogische Zentrum helps unskilled young people to follow programmes adapted to their various needs. The programmes share the common objective of helping these young people to complete their basic training and to answer better the needs of the labour market.
	Reintegration of Greek migrants. Two projects may be mentioned: at Notia (Greece), there is a project, operated with the help of local volunteers, to assist the integration of former political refugees returning from East European countries; in Berlin, there is an information centre which helps, on a socioeconomic and cultural level, the reintegration into their native country of Greek workers who wish to leave Germany.
	Assistance for single parent families in Luxembourg. The 'Femmes en détresse' organization helps single parent families to be less isolated through an information and advice centre, workshops, (which, apart from any proposal for individual social assistance, offer theoretical and practical group courses related to everyday living), a child-care service and a meeting and leisure centre.
	Project to combat poverty among the elderly in Rome. The 'Cultura e assistenza popolare' organization has as its objective the promotion, establishment and management of a series of neighbourhood cooperatives which join together the elderly and social helpers — the one category old, the other young and unemployed. The organization also identifies those who are poor and ensures their access to social benefits, to home assistance, to legal assistance against evictions, to housing improvements.
	Emergency shelter, pre-community accommodation and encouragement to self-help for the homeless in Paris. To cope with the moral distress, the physical degradation and the anguish which sometimes paralyses any effort of will, the

'Compagnons d'Emmaus' provide a system of shelter for these people who are often exhausted and resigned in the face of their failure. The homeless must have the opportunity of being accommodated in a community centre and of being integrated into a working group which will help them to recover their identity and dignity

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^{*} Offices also exist in other countries including all Member States.

