

Irish delegates' contribution to 2014 European People's University

Hard work, privilege, luck or right?

We don't know a half about what our rights are. Sometimes we don't know what is a privilege, what is a right or what is just the result of luck? And in some situation like housing, we feel it's a right. Many people believe it's a right in law but it isn't. How can we be better educated about our rights? What is the obligation of the State? Most people don't even have to know what the rights mean because it's given to them on a plate. For others, there is information, but it's put in such a way that it's difficult to understand it.

For a majority, access to basic rights is given because of the securities they have from the start. There is a responsibility for society and the Government to make sure that the people who have to work hard to access their rights are really supported.

It's not just about claiming rights, it's also about finding, when you struggle, the appropriate support to access the rights that the large majority of people can easily access.

When we say that : « *We don't mean you should concentrate on us because of our difficulties, but because we are human beings* », we don't mean, “We had hard lives, we are deserving it, you owe us a flat or a job...” We feel that this approach creates a label. People can build a negative view about these hard lives and start to judge us. That is exactly the perception, the attitudes that we want to change. We know that it is because we are human beings that we are entitled to rights and to respect. This is the fundamental point we want to make.

How can the EU make sure that all citizens know how they can use the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights? Can EU support a better education about all rights?

As it happens now in Ireland with the Constitutional Convention, could a European debate take place to integrate more Economic, Social and Cultural rights in the Charter?

How can the EU support a culture of a fair society based on rights for all?

Support our work to improve our lives, don't make this support insecure or unsafe, or non-existent

Unsecurities

One of us was in the project for a year, doing well and they just pulled down the project. All the hope he had just went down. For every step he went forward, he felt he was going ten back. He left the project and had to find another place. If you have again to go all the way back to the beginning, you can ask yourself “Why bother?”. This is a pattern for too many years. If there was no break in the process, we think many of us would have had a place of their own now. This isn't a one time experience that happened to us.

Feeling on a safe path when you are homeless

« When I had to use hostels, I must say I felt safer on the streets. And in the summer I stayed on the street. »
« Now I hope one day I will get access to social housing but I think I will have to rent something on the private market before and we all know this is risky. Social housing is much more secure. That's where I feel they don't support the recovery process because we know the insecurities of the private market. Rent goes up, allowances go down. Owners want to make high profit and escape high taxes, so don't accept people on allowances. »

« It's the same feeling when you come out prison. A few years ago, support when you came out of prison was very limited. They gave you 5 Euros and you were out. Many people who were homeless, without money, just came back in jail a few days later. You come to the end of your sentence and you are just thrown out. You don't have money, you have nothing to do and nowhere to go to or to stay? »

So what you are going to do? You can just go back to criminal behavior to get money. There is a need to put something in place for the people who come to the end of their sentence. How can we ease the way, to help to get a better place?

Now there is a program to support you when you are released. It's called ISM Integrated Sentence Management. They give support for housing, and for some integration programmes. For housing, you have 6 weeks to organise yourself and it's a big challenge to find landlords who will accept you. »

Can the EU help, advice States to create appropriate support processes which are consistent, and really address the needs of people facing hardships because of poverty?

How can people with life experience of hardships be more involved in designing these support processes?

Who or what really matters in society?

There are so many people homeless, and so many hostels in which many people don't feel safe. But also there too many old and new flats which could be used and are boarded up and remain empty. In many places, this is part of some regeneration programs which started many years ago and which were stopped because of the economic crisis. These programs gave hope, but then the recession came in and it messed it all up.

Is it acceptable that for people in need, it just takes 15 years to make some flats available? So many families know Bed and Breakfast which are not fit for dogs. During all this time, decisions were taken to use money available, but where are the priorities? Families, mothers with children, have to fight and fight to get proper social housing and if after many years they finally manage to get the minimum they could, find that people around them just think they were lucky. This is not the type of right-based society we are entitled to.

The people working in service are under stress. The resources and the policies are not there to support properly in a quick way. Before something happens you might be long away on the road. People do loose hope, do loose faith in the system, they are frustrated, and they feel they are left abandoned, rejected... Homeless people wait so long for the proper help. There should be a process. And when you see what happened to the banks... They were saved overnight with millions of Euros.

The economic crisis and austerity measures we have experienced in Ireland had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable of our people. Too often the Government focuses on the budget targets and ignores the impact of persistent cuts on real people and communities. To what extent was and is the EU responsible for this?

We recognize that in the past the EU was a driving force for positive social changes in Ireland. But the recession, the EU-IMF "bailout" of November 2010 and resulting Irish Government policies have adversely affected our lives. People on low income and social welfare were the hardest hit by austerity policies. At the same time, newspaper uncover again and again situations where people earn enormous amounts of money. It is difficult to feel part of the same society, to feel a sense of common citizenship when there are such inequalities.

What has the EU learned from the recent crisis in regards to the poorest communities?

Can the EU in the future integrate poverty and equality impact assessments as a central part of all policy making and crisis management?

Can the EU address the level of inequality that we have reached in our societies, for example about the wide gap between lowest and highest incomes?

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