

PLAN FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY IN FRANCE: THE POOR WILL HAVE TO WAIT.

THE DIRECTION IS GOOD BUT THE MEANS ARE INSUFFICIENT!

Following the long-awaited announcement of the Plan for the fight against poverty in France, announced by the President Emmanuel Macron on September 13th, 2018, it is evident that the issue of poverty has re-surfaced as one of the Elysée's priorities. Being the French representative of the European network for the fight against poverty, EAPN France has drafted a comprehensive critique to the plan at hand.

Throughout the proposal, we believe that the direction offers a promising outlook as the plan is based on an observation shared by many: poverty is a violation of human rights. For too long, our society has become used to conditions of poverty that have passed from generation to generation. For this, it must be eradicated by ensuring that poor children do not become poor adults, also by questioning the validity of an economic policy that creates poverty and inequality.

The measures proposed within the plan (and for the most part already implemented) are headed in the right direction:

1. In the fields of early childhood and youth:
 - Duplication of primary classes in priority education zones;
 - Obligation of school attendance from the age of 3 years old;
 - Childcare arrangements accessible to all, especially poor families;
 - Improvement of attendance and quality of cafeterias as well as breakfasts in disadvantaged areas;
 - Monitoring and training obligation for "dropouts";
 - Reform of orientation at the end of colleges and reinforcement of learning;
 - Extension of the youth guarantee up to 500,000 beneficiaries;
 - Housing, training and employment of young people leaving ESA until 21 years old.

2. Work for all with the creation of a Public Employment Service (Law planned for 2019) which should eventually allow any recipient of the RSA to find a job or an activity.

3. A "universal income of activity" (Law planned for 2020) which should replace all or part of the current social benefits and which would include, for the beneficiaries, rights and duties. It will be necessary to ensure that the merger of the minima does not result in a further decrease in the PLA, which is less visible since it will be included in the new single income.

The President of the Republic concluded his speech by saying that this plan was part of the based on three principles: production, education, and solidarity, all of which – as the President underlined – are necessary to redefine the welfare state of the 21st century.

Does France have the means to lead this battle? The answer is no.

For EAPN France, the fight against poverty requires the effectiveness of the fundamental rights such as housing, food, health, education, employment, culture, and holidays to name a few.

The fight against poverty also means reducing inequalities, which is a plague and continue to endanger our democracies, as we have already seen in a number of our neighboring countries. France, like other nations, has not see these inequalities diminish; quite the contrary.

Throughout his speech, the President of the Republic mentioned "housing plan first". However, what answers does it bring to the millions of poorly housed people in our country? We know that housing is the first condition for a dignified life. The glaring lack of social housing and the overcrowding of accommodation facilities to house the homeless show that there is an urgency to solve this imminent problem. A recent study indicates that the 115 service does not answer half of the calls.

Food Security

More than 4 million people in France struggle to adequately eat and feed their families on an everyday basis. What action has been taken in the States General of Food (Etats Généraux de l'alimentation) whose objectives were to reduce poverty among farmers and to allow everyone access to a healthy, safe and sustainable alimentation? Do we know what France's position will be at the dawn of the renegotiations of the common agricultural policy and the renewal of the European Fund for Aid to the Most Deprived?

Above all, the measures taken by the Government have cut the purchasing power of the poorest households: a decrease of € 5 a month in PLA, an increase in the CSG on pensions above € 1200 (i.e. income not far from the poverty line), and no revaluation of the RSA nor the family benefits that many poor families receive.

Inequalities

The most concerning issue about the announced plan is that nothing is said about the existing social and territorial inequalities. How can one live in France today with a single SMIC (French minimum wage) within one family, or even more with the RSA? We would have liked to hear the President of the Republic propose concrete measures to solve this question at the heart of our society: instead, the rich get richer while the poor and the middle classes get poorer.

Furthermore, it is true that measures taken in the field of childhood and education will ultimately advance in the direction of reducing inequalities. But how many generations will it take our society to solve this problem?

The precarious situation in which thousands of foreign families and young people live in, brings to light the lack of awareness of the urgency of situations: nothing is planned to ensure the care of thousands of unaccompanied minors and nothing is announced to allow the regularization, the insertion and the access to a lodging of the foreign families maintained for years in a precarious situation. The plan at

hand must also concern the future of all these children by guaranteeing them access to regular schooling and living conditions that are serene and dignified.

Europe

Europe and the European Union are absent from the President's speech. However, at the Göteborg Social Summit last November, France adopted the European Social Rights Platform, which sets out 20 precise measures concerning both equal opportunities and access to the labor market, as well as fair working conditions and social protection for all. How effective will these adopted measures be in our country?

It is evident that the goal of reducing the number of poor people in Europe by 20 million, set in 2010 to be achieved by 2020, has become unattainable. In France, poverty has increased by 1 million over the last 10 years; to have reached the 2020 goals, it should have decreased at a much faster rate. It is also evident that the objective of eradicating poverty in 2030, the United Nations's target for sustainable development, will not be able to be achieved under these circumstances.

On the eve of the European elections, it would have been useful for the Plan to act as an example, as the President concluded his speech by saying that "France must lead this battle." In view of the measures announced today, France does not seem to have the appropriate means to eradicate poverty.