EPALE Podcast

Innovative Strategies for Poverty Alleviation in Modern Society

Transcript

Christin Cieslak:
Elisabeth Vernier is the Advocacy Manager at the nonprofit organisation Duo for a Job and Intergenerational Mentoring Program that empowers young job seekers by pairing them with volunteers aged 50 plus to enhance their employment prospects. Elisabeth brings over 11 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, with a strong focus on migration, integration, and inclusion in the labour market. She holds a Master's degree in Anthropology, specialising in migration, minorities, and multiculturalism. Hello, Elisabeth.

Elisabeth Vernier:
Hi, thanks for having me.

Christin Cieslak:
With us is also Amana Ferro. She is a Senior Policy Advisor with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network, focusing specifically on EU strategies and processes in the fields of Roma poverty and social exclusion, including access to health, housing, education, social protection, and social services. She chiefly works on frameworks such as the European Semester, the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, the Child Guarantee, the Care Strategy, the Social Economic Action Plan, and so on. To supply a Roma rights perspective, welcome both of you. Thank you very much for joining me today to talk about poverty. I feel the best place to start would be to discuss the criteria you use to define poverty. I'm pretty sure the listeners have an idea, but I think it is good to get a clear definition of what we are talking about. Amana, may I invite you to let us know how you define poverty?

Amana Ferro:
Yes, of course. Hello, Christin. Hello, Elisabeth. And everybody who is listening to us right now. First of all, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here with you today. My name is Amana Ferro, and as you heard, I represent the ERGO Network—European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network—which is an umbrella platform of 33 organisations working for and with Roma communities all across Europe, in the European Union as well as outside of it. Our objectives as organisations are fittingly for today to combat poverty, but also inequality and anti-Gypsyism, which is anti-Roma racism, and to strengthen Roma civil society and participation in decision-making so that we can have better policies for guaranteeing inclusion in every aspect of daily life and equality for Roma across Europe.
Poverty is actually a very good question because it's a term that everybody uses, and a lot of people wonder about what makes the poor poor, where do you draw the line? Is there a line? There is a line. It's actually called the poverty line, or it's also referred to as the poverty threshold. In the European Union, but also more globally, we speak of two types of poverty. One of them is absolute poverty, which is defined in terms of global measures, such as less than $100 a day or less than $200 a day. This form of poverty has mainly been eradicated in Europe, except for some pockets which still remain, such as people experiencing homelessness or Roma communities.

So, I might know a little something about that. But the other type is relative poverty, which means you are not under $100 a day, but you still live in conditions which, by comparison to your peers, are considered lower. This is called relative poverty, and this is what is mainly used as an indicator at the EU level and beyond to qualify people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. At risk of poverty is an indicator which means that somebody's income is below 60% of the median

income in that country. There are different countries, and we all agree, of course, that the cost of living is not the same from Sweden to Romania, for example. Obviously, there are countries where things cost more and others where things cost less. So, cost of living not being the same, you cannot have the same measure in every single country of the European Union, which is why poverty is calculated. Relative poverty is calculated at the national level. Every country calculates a national poverty line. So there is a Belgian poverty line, a Bulgarian poverty line, a Danish poverty line, a Portuguese poverty line, and so on and so forth, which means 60% of whatever is the median income of people in that country.

So, as a collective, people in, say, Portugal, have a median income of X. That is the amount, and then if somebody lives in a household where an individual has, per month, less than 60% of that collectively agreed, collectively calculated median, that person is considered to live in poverty. What does that tell us? That tells us that we are understanding poverty in a way where a certain country defines how people in this country live. And then, if somebody's life experience and living conditions are comparatively worse, then this is something that warrants policy action to correct and bring people over the poverty line.

So, without being very technical—but I had to be a little bit because all this is ultimately about—it's statistics that determine if somebody is poor, which is also, and actually the indicator at the European level is more complex than that because at risk of poverty and social exclusion includes an additional index on material deprivation. How often do you have meat or protein a week? Can you afford a paid vacation? Do you have sanitation in your house? There's an index of questions pertaining to material deprivation. And then another indicator that adds to this is what is called low work intensity households, which means how employed are you—very employed, a little employed, just once in a while, in a precarious job, part-time? Because one's state of employment has a direct correlation—it doesn't, but it's presumed to have a direct correlation—with one's state of poverty.

So the indicator is even more complex than that. But ultimately, and this is maybe my last sentence on this topic, it is a conventional measure which is calculated statistically, which determines this poverty line at the level of every country. And whoever has a monthly income beyond that line is considered at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Of course, in reality, somebody who is €100 above that line is definitely still at risk of poverty. So we need to look at things a little bit more nuanced than that. And the goal is to strive for egalitarian, inclusive societies that guarantee well-being for everybody, rather than just look at comparative. But this is how we define and measure poverty at the EU level and also beyond.

Christin Cieslak:
Thank you, Amana. That was extremely insightful. Thank you so much. It was very comprehensive and not too technical. Very interesting. Thank you so much. Elisabeth, is there something you might want to say about your project to let the listeners know what it is that you're working on?

Elisabeth Vernier:
Yeah, sure. And thanks, Amana, for explaining these concepts so brilliantly. It makes it much easier for me to start from the beginning of this story of Duo for a Job. I will start from the Belgian perspective because Duo for a Job is a project that started in Belgium. It's now also in France and the Netherlands, but it started in Belgium. The statistics on the risk of poverty or social exclusion tell us that one in five in Belgium is at risk. That's the mean number. But when we look at certain groups, we can identify groups that are at higher risk. For example, if we look at employment, one out of two of the unemployed in Belgium is living in a poor household. If we

look in terms of age, the risk of poverty is higher among young people aged 16 to 25. This is the most vulnerable group; one in four is at risk of poverty and social exclusion. And if we look in terms of origin, for example, non-EU foreigners living in Belgium have three times the risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to someone of Belgian origin.

So if you look at young people who are unemployed and who have non-EU origin, they accumulate several risks that exacerbate their situation. Not only do they face increased difficulties in accessing the labour market, but also the chances of securing stable employment that can get them out of the situation are significantly lower. They get fewer chances, and statistically they are underrepresented in the labour market. We can see that in the employment gap numbers. What does the employment gap mean? If we look at people with Belgian origin, almost 80% are employed, and if you look at people of non-EU origin, it's about 50%. So that's an enormous gap. Belgium is one of the worst countries in Europe when we look at the gap in employment.

And so this accumulation of risk factors leads to a higher risk of poverty and a higher risk of remaining trapped in this situation, not having the social mobility to get out of the situation. And it's also something that's transmitted through generations. Even if you look at second and third generation immigrants from outside of the EU in Belgium, their employment rates are significantly lower, and even if you correct for education levels, that's still the case. It means that even with similar degrees, someone of second or third Moroccan origin, for example, who grew up in Belgium, has significantly fewer opportunities, even if he or she has the same degree as a young person of Belgian origin.

So that's exactly the fact or the consultation that led the founders of Duo for a Jobto start a project targeted specifically at young people looking for a job with a non-EU origin. And that actually justifies also why this target group was chosen.

So what is Duo for a Job? The title or the name of the organisation says it itself: Duo for a Jobmakes dues. We match young job seekers of non-EU origin living in Belgium, France, or the Netherlands, looking for a job, with experienced mentors. These mentors are volunteers who have extensive career experience, sector knowledge, and large professional networks. They can actually transmit this knowledge and these networks to the young person. They meet once a week for six months. It's a free programme, very intensive, and tailor-made to the needs and profile of the young person, as well as to the mentor. The mentor is matched to the mentee because he or she can offer something in terms of experience and knowledge that matches the needs of the young person. The objective is to find sustainable employment or training that will lead to a decent, sustainable job in the labour market.

What we also see, for example, is that people with non-EU origins, even if they land a job, often find themselves in more precarious situations with unstable contracts and lower salaries. Our objective is also to help them secure stable jobs and to use their talent, experience, degrees (if they have them), or practical talents, and place them in the right position in the labour market, rather than letting them be stuck in unemployment or precarious jobs."

Christin Cieslak:
Can I just really briefly interrupt? You guys have really good speakers; I'm so happy. I will not have to cut out a lot of ads. You speak very well, so thank you. That was pretty great. Sorry, I just got too happy. Let's move on. Amana, do you maybe want to just chime in and say something and maybe, I don't know, make the connection a little? OK, I will just cut here then now."

Amana Ferro:

I am very glad Elisabeth brought up something that actually perfectly stages where I was going to talk about as well, which is the role discrimination plays when we talk about power. We often heard in the presentation we had just now about third country nationals, including those who are no longer first-generation, second-generation, or third-generation, still face discrimination. These people have something in common with the constituents that my organisation represents, which is that they are both racialised communities in a predominantly white continent. This means that they both face discrimination, which is experienced in everyday life and is not confined to employment. The consequences in employment are devastating, but so are the consequences in other areas of life.

Let me just give you some very quick statistics: one in four Roma, for example, experiences anti-Roma racism or discrimination on a day-to-day basis. This happens when trying to access healthcare, housing, social protection, education, training, or jobs. When they do manage to access these services, resources, and rights (because let's not forget that these are rights most of which are enshrined in charters—I'll get back to that point after this for our listeners), they often find that these are poor services for poor people, second-hand services for second-hand citizens or residents. The Roma also tend to be overrepresented in precarious, low-quality jobs. There are also issues such as the ethnic pay gap. We talk about the gender pay gap, where women are paid less than men. There is also a predominance of overlooking workers based on ethnicity, including being overlooked for promotions or training opportunities, keeping them stuck in low-paying, demeaning jobs, taking on more risky jobs, or unpaid overtime. At the same time, these workers tend to be underrepresented in trade union structures, which are supposed to protect workers. This leads to racialised workers not being sufficiently represented in collective bargaining and trade union representation.

Another aspect is access to income, which comes from employment but can also come from social protection and social security. However, perpetual stigmatisation of benefit claimants and people in poverty, along with discrimination enacted by those working in these services—including public employment services, social services, and social protection agencies—results in racialised claimants facing reduced opportunities to access employment, housing, health, education, and social protection. They also face discrimination from institutions that are supposed to help them. The interplay between discrimination and poverty cannot be understated.

Elisabeth Vernier:

What I find remarkable is how many times the word 'access' has come up here. I think it's also very key. Access to rights—the take-up of rights—even if the rights are there. For example, in Belgium, we have a social security system. The rights are there, but through many obstacles, which can be conscious or unconscious biases, these people cannot take up the rights or have difficulty doing so because of language barriers, administrative complexity, or simply not knowing where to go. Services are increasingly digitalised since COVID, which also poses a challenge.

So, the rights are there, and theoretically, people can access them, but it's made very difficult. This makes it very hard to get out of the situation. For example, in access to employment, yes, people are discriminated against, but there are also many unconscious biases and obstacles linked to the complexity of their situation. For instance, having an unstable residence permit due to family unification might prevent them from accessing public welfare services because if they become a burden to the state, their residence permit could be at risk. They might also have health issues, not speak Dutch or French very well, or be a single mother with two children. This superposition of different vulnerabilities makes it very hard to access some of these rights.

Now, let's talk about solutions. Mentoring can be a solution in the sense that a mentor looks at the whole package and the whole situation holistically. This means that while we are taking steps towards employment, we are not blind to your mental or physical health, or the fact that you are a single mother with two children. As a mentor with experience in this country and sector, I know which services to push, and I can send the same email multiple times if necessary. I can really demand that your rights be upheld and even threaten to get a lawyer if there is a risk that you won't get what you deserve. Having someone who looks at your situation holistically and can overcome barriers that prevent you from moving forward is very powerful. Many services are divided into competencies like education, employment, and health, but what's needed is someone who views the whole situation and has an individual approach. Improving access to basic services will also improve access to employment, as everything is interconnected."

Amana Ferro:
I want to jump right in and say I fully agree with everything that has been said thus far. I want to further strengthen and complement this discussion. We are talking about access to rights. When we talk about poverty, we must keep in mind a rights-based approach. Let me quickly quote from the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: Article 1 speaks about life in dignity for all, and Article 34 speaks about social security services, housing, and a decent existence for all. These are values we share, at least in the European Union.

Most countries are parties to international conventions, declarations of human rights, and various human rights instruments that make people in poverty—or people in general—rights holders, and the state duty bearers. States have a duty to ensure that people do not live in poverty. People have a right to not live in poverty. It's not something that they have to deserve or work hard for; it is something they have a right to. Thus, living in poverty is a breach of human rights, and solving poverty is not a matter of charity or generosity, but a matter of justice and access to rights.

Access once again passes through ending the stigmatisation of people who need support. People find themselves in these situations not through a failure of their own; poverty is not a personal flaw but a systemic failure. Therefore, it cannot be remedied through personal efforts alone but requires systemic remedies. This is the root of ending stigmatisation against people experiencing poverty and understanding that fighting poverty is a matter of rights.

Promoting what we call 'active inclusion'—integrated approaches that look at those who work and those who cannot work—is crucial. Employment, especially pathway personalised approaches to decent, sustainable employment (not just any employment, as that would only perpetuate poverty), and not punitive activation, is a very powerful tool in combating poverty. However, not everyone can work, so equal support through services and adequate income support for social participation for those who cannot work is just as important.

It's crucial to end punitive practices and promote personalised approaches. Elisabeth's point is incredibly important: people are very different, and there is no single box for 'poor people' or 'Roma people'. Everyone fits into many different boxes, which is why we talk about intersectionality so much. We all have different attributes and face discrimination daily on various issues such as gender, sexuality, race (a false construct), ethnicity, class, and ability. Therefore, tailored, person-centred approaches are fundamental, whether for employment activation or access to services or social support.

Comprehensive wrap-around support that is rooted in the individual and accounts for their specificity is necessary, including support with complex bureaucracy. Eligibility and conditionality

often serve to discourage people from accessing their rights. This is a deliberate policy by the state to limit access, particularly to social protection entitlements.

Now it's my turn to talk solutions. Transform the system into supportive infrastructure and services that view working with people in poverty as a means to help them access their rights, rather than as a way to implicitly punish them for the flaws of the system. Put in place measures to terminate punitive active labour market policies, as they are called, including conditionalities and sanctions, and withdrawing benefits from people for not complying with various conditions. Also, implement support systems such as mediators who can assist with language barriers, the digital divide, and navigating complicated bureaucracy. It's crucial to have individuals who stand by these people to show them they are not alone. Often, people in services will humiliate those they perceive as weak and powerless. However, as Elisabeth mentioned, if someone appears to have the backing of a lawyer or knows their rights, it changes the dynamic. Unfortunately, we still see power struggles manifesting every day with people experiencing poverty and racialised communities, including ethnic minorities, third-country nationals, migrants, and refugees. It is absolutely fundamental to have these mediators coupled with anti-bias and sensitivity training for all staff working in such services. This should be combined with adequate resources to ensure these services are not understaffed and that the person behind the counter has sufficient time to address each case in a personalised manner. This approach helps in starting to unravel the increasing poverty rates in Europe.

Christin Cieslak:
Thank you very much. That was so interesting. I'm just thinking you have talked about solutions, and obviously things are ever-changing. I'm just wondering, with changing socioeconomic conditions, how can we ensure that poverty alleviation strategies remain relevant and responsive to the population?

Amana Ferro:
A couple of thoughts on how we can ensure that anti-poverty strategies at the EU, national, and beyond-EU levels can be effective: we need to start from a rights-based approach and understand poverty as a violation of human rights, with the fight against poverty being a matter of access to rights. Another point I won't delve into deeply, but which I have mentioned before, is increasing income. We live in a cash-based economy, and the ability to afford goods and services—including healthcare and education—is still the most effective way to combat poverty. Therefore, access to quality employment and other forms of non-employment income support is paramount.

Combating discrimination, including anti-Gypsyism, in all areas of life, particularly when interacting with public services, is also crucial. Additionally, there are two new points I haven't mentioned thus far. One is mainstreaming poverty. The EU currently has a social Tailor Action Plan, which is the overarching anti-poverty strategy until 2030. However, it is not specifically an anti-poverty strategy; it is the EU's social strategy and contains three headline targets: improving employment rates, improving access to education and training, and reducing the number of people experiencing poverty by 15,000,000 by 2030. This target is quite unambitious, but we work with what we have.

This strategy is currently the EU's overarching social strategy with a quantifiable objective for poverty reduction. In addition to this, the EU Roma Strategic Framework adopted in 2021 and its corresponding Council recommendation have horizontal objectives, also quantified, of reducing Roma poverty by 20-30%. However, we have seen precious little synergy between these

frameworks. Roma poverty in Europe is over 80%, with some countries experiencing up to 97–98% poverty rates among Roma. These are the numbers we're talking about. There is a dire need for coherence between economic objectives, social priorities such as fighting poverty, and equality priorities like combating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities. Better mainstreaming of poverty, specifically Roma poverty, is desperately needed.

We have a Union of Equality at the EU level that must be implemented in synergy with the socioeconomic strategies of the same European Union. One final point is measuring Roma poverty. The way poverty is defined and measured goes hand in hand with how it is calculated. Currently, data collection on poverty is not disaggregated by factors such as ethnic background, which would help capture the situation of Roma and third-country nationals. We need to disaggregate data collection under EU main data collection and statistical exercises such as Eurostat and EU-SILC to include criteria such as ethnic background. We should also consider piloting targeted social audits in specific communities to identify poverty risks stemming from intersectional vulnerabilities and discrimination, and run distributional impact assessments on all policies. This might sound a bit technical, but unfortunately, policymaking often involves a lot of complex language and legalese. However, this is where change can be achieved.

Christin Cieslak:
Thank you, Amana, so much. I appreciate the comprehensive overview. Elisabeth, could you talk a bit about how in your project you tailor your approach to the specific needs of your target group?

Elisabeth Vernier:
Yes, certainly. The fact that we create an individual relationship between two people is already very tailor-made. When a young person looking for a job comes to Do For Job, they undergo a first intake interview. The same goes for the mentors who want to be volunteers; they also have a personal interview and receive a professional training of four days to make them confident in their role and to provide them with the necessary tools. Through these individual interviews, we get a good view of who each person is, what obstacles they face in the labour market, and whether they have housing issues, medical issues, or are single parents.

If a job seeker has a clear idea of what they want to do—e.g., becoming an electrician and having some training but difficulty finding the right vacancies—we match them with a mentor with experience in that sector. In one out of three cases, however, the job seekers do not have a clear idea of what they want to do, which is not unusual as many are migrants and unfamiliar with the labour market. They may lack information on the labour market or have difficulties valorising their experiences or degrees from their country of origin in their new country. This can leave them disoriented and unsure of their future.

I want to add something to what Amana mentioned about discrimination and how it plays out. We observe a lot of auto-discrimination, meaning that if someone is constantly faced with discrimination from an early age, they might start to believe that they are not capable of achieving anything in life. This self-doubt can lead them to settle for less, like a cleaning job, even if they are capable of much more. The role of the mentor is to rebuild that self-confidence and show them that they are not alone.

Having someone who believes in you and can show you future possibilities, even if they seem unattainable, is incredibly powerful. The mentoring relationship involves sitting down with the mentee week by week, discussing their objectives, what went well, what didn't, and how to tackle problems. When we asked our mentees about the added value of having a mentor, they often mentioned the psychological and social support. The personal connection helps break through the

stigma and judgment associated with unemployment and poverty. It's not just about writing motivation letters and CVs; it's about helping them believe in themselves and showing them the way forward. This approach works well; 7 out of 10 young people of non-EU origin who come to us find a job or gain further opportunities after the mentoring relationship. Even after six months, many of these mentor-mentee relationships continue, with ongoing support and communication. This personal connection is a powerful antidote to bureaucracy. It's not a computer or a website but a real person beside you, providing motivation and support.

Christin Cieslak:
Thank you, Elisabeth. That was really interesting. I appreciate the positive perspective and the effective use of intergenerational relationships. I'm wondering if we could talk about what can be done at various levels—local, national, or global. What role can governments, NGOs, and international organisations play in supporting or scaling up poverty alleviation initiatives? Amana, what are your thoughts?

Amana Ferro:
Which are rights-based approaches, mainstreaming poverty in other areas? What else did I say? Measuring poverty, increasing access to income. So basically, those are mine.

Christin Cieslak:
Elisabeth, do you want to add anything?

Elisabeth Vernier:
Yeah, we did some research about a year ago. We examined the quantitative data we have from the Mantis on their situation during the first intake. We also conducted qualitative interviews with them to find out what the obstacles were and what possible solutions might be. We found, and it's not a surprise, that almost half of the mentees had no income or were reliant on support from their family or spouse. That's not a big surprise, as half of our mentees came to Belgium or have a residence permit related to family reunification. This means they are financially dependent on family members. The other half are refugees, so they receive social assistance, but it's not income from employment and is below the poverty line.
When we ask the mentors, they state that debt and financial insecurity are the largest categories of social problems faced by their mentees. This can be quite challenging because young people in these precarious situations are often in urgent need of earning a living, often in survival mode. This mindset can be difficult to combine with a long-term professional plan or dream. On one side, there's the urgency to earn money, and on the other side, the need to get a sustainable job. Often, the mentor has to work on both aspects—perhaps interim or temporary jobs to meet immediate needs while also working on a long-term plan.
What did we find that policy-wise would make a big difference in their lives when we had interviews with them? Social services and social support are very important, as we already mentioned. This tailor-made approach is crucial. These frontline services need to ensure humane and quality reception, provide information and guidance tailored to the users' needs, and avoid dropouts.
What we see with the movement towards digitalisation is that more and more processes are online. Everything seems to be a form that you need to complete online or even initial meetings with the system are either online or by phone. It's very hard to access a service without making

an appointment, so these services need to be humane and available even without appointments. This is essential for people who don't have a smartphone, computer, or access to the internet. Individual support is extremely important because every situation is different, as Amana said, and solutions need to be based on the individual situation. Improving access to services is also crucial. Services, when available, need to have a low threshold and be accessible. This includes making information available in other languages. You cannot expect a Ukrainian or Syrian who has just arrived in Belgium to understand bureaucratic forms and procedures in Dutch, French, or even English. Information needs to be available in the beneficiaries' languages.

We must also be aware of the digital divide, which remains a significant barrier to accessing services. Residents and social support are often coupled, leading to precarious situations. For example, if you're here on family reunification, you cannot be a burden on social security, so you will be dependent on your family's income or have no income at all. In cases of family violence, this dependency is a major issue and should be addressed separately.

I'm talking a lot about employment because our project focuses on employment. Improving access to employment and combating discrimination in this area is very important. There shouldn't be such a significant gap based on origin. Employment numbers show a persistent employment gap, with analyses repeated but little effective action to combat it. This gap is frustratingly persistent, and while we want to contribute through concrete projects, state-level efforts are also necessary.

Christin Cieslak:
Absolutely. Thank you so much. I feel this is a good point to try to break things down to one central message that you would like any listener who is tuning in today to take home after we finish this conversation. Is there one thing you want people to keep in mind after they have listened to your wonderful conversation?

Amana Ferro:
I'm going to cheat and have three key messages, which I have prepared here. These messages are rooted in the same perspective of supporting people, showing solidarity, and promoting their well-being. It's not about productivity, growth, competitiveness, business, or profit. It's about supporting people to be the best version of themselves for their well-being and their communities, rather than for money.

My three key messages would be:
1. Discrimination is important and it works both ways. Discrimination based on a single factor, such as ethnic background for racialised communities, and discrimination based on intersectional factors definitely leads to poverty and restricts access to rights, resources, and services. Conversely, poverty itself leads to discrimination, creating a double punishment. Any strategy going forward, whether from governments, civil society, or individuals, must be mindful of this link between discrimination and poverty because they go hand in hand. We need to combat both to build equal opportunities and an inclusive society.
2. Poverty is not an accident; it's a political choice. Poverty is a direct consequence of our current economic model, which is increasingly based on competitiveness. Competitiveness implies a system where some win and some lose, and there will always be losers. As long as we follow the current economic paradigm, poverty will persist. To end poverty, we need to make opposite choices and change the paradigm, focusing on human well-being rather than profit for the few.

3. Involving beneficiaries and their civil society organisations is absolutely paramount. As a representative of civil society, I can say that people who have experienced poverty and discrimination understand these issues better than those in offices with fancy titles. They are the ones who have lived through it. Alongside them, social workers, frontline workers, mediators, and grassroots communities who work with these people every day have the solutions. Excluding them from the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies is not only disrespectful but also inefficient. Evidence-based policies require evidence from the ground, not just reports in offices. Empowering people to access their rights and building societies where these rights are guiding principles for collective well-being is crucial.

Christin Cieslak:
Absolutely fantastic. Thank you so much. Elisabeth, I don't know if you would like to add something.

Elisabeth Vernier:
It's difficult to add something to such a complete conclusion already. I would just say that from our experience, we need people-centred approaches and strong social services. Social services should be accessible to all, not just the privileged few. We need more connections between people and fewer procedures. Bringing people together, creating strong bonds, and sensitising others to the situation of others is crucial. This can only be achieved by fostering empathy and direct contact between people. Policy is one thing, but societal change requires active citizen engagement. We need to build connections between citizens, which will be my final word.