

**ATD Fourth World** believes there will be progress for everyone in Europe when the poorest and most socially-excluded people are both the proponents and the beneficiaries of that progress. Today, ATD Fourth World is present in, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, and has links with people and organizations working in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Russia and Slovakia. In December 2007, the European Commission itself stated that even within the European Union, one of the richest regions of the world,



*“There are still far too many people living in destitution, without access to basic services such as healthcare (...)*

*A situation which contradicts the principles of solidarity and social justice defended by the European Union”.*

## Delegation to the European Union

ATD Fourth World was established in 1957, the year in which the Treaty of Rome was signed. A Delegation to the European Union was set up in Brussels in 1972, providing ATD Fourth World with the means to actively participate in the development of the European Union.

*“We won’t wait for these economic changes to be completed before we rally to the side of the world’s poorest people, all the more so, because these changes, which have been carried out without them, and without taking their experience into account, will not benefit them later on.”*

Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World.

ATD Fourth World’s Delegation to the European Union defines its primary objectives as follows:

- The eradication of extreme poverty must be an essential aim of the EU.
- The EU must, in all the policies it implements, ensure respect for

basic rights by adhering to the European Union’s Charter of Fundamental Rights.

- The most excluded people must be listened to and involved.

ATD Fourth World’s activities in pursuit of these objectives are as follows:

→ **Organising meetings between delegations of people living in long-term poverty and accountable European politicians.** In June 2008, a delegation of young Europeans (from Austria, Belgium, France, Poland and the United Kingdom) met Pierre Mairesse, the Director General of Education and Culture of the European Commission, to address the issue of *‘I dream of having a profession’*.

→ **Participating each year in European Round Table discussions on poverty and social exclusion.** In Marseille in 2008, ATD Fourth World organised a European Fourth World People’s University on the

topic of *‘active inclusion’*, as part of the round table talks. This allowed participants in the Round Table talks and people living in poverty to exchange experiences and ideas.

→ **Running the secretariat of the Fourth World Committee which is an intergroup of the European Parliament.** Its activities include: proposing amendments, resolutions, submitting written questions to the European Commission, raising awareness through informal meetings and themed discussions with activists on the ground. The Fourth World Committee has, for example, submitted an amendment aimed at making extreme poverty and social exclusion important issues over the next few years for the European Agency for Fundamental Rights.

→ **Working in partnership with other NGOs at European level,** for example, as an active member of the EAPN (European

Anti-Poverty Network), the Platform of European Social NGOs, the European Youth Forum and the Permanent Forum of European Civil Society.

→ Organising meetings of the 'Joseph Wresinski Circle', to consider the relevance of Joseph Wresinski's social project to the real world. In January 2008, a

meeting at the European Commission was organised for Commission officials, under the heading '*Persistent poverty: a challenge for Europe*'.



## ATD Fourth World's work at the Council of Europe

ATD Fourth World was granted participatory status at the Council of Europe in 1977 and has had an official representative working to influence the Council's work on poverty issues since then. In 2007, its representative was Vice-President of the Extreme Poverty and Social Cohesion Grouping, for which a major report was produced for the Council of Europe on the «Contribution of NGOs to the fight against poverty and social exclusion in Europe.» From 2004 to 2008, Annelise Oeschger, ATD Fourth World member, was president of the Conference of INGOs at the Council of Europe.

Among the activities undertaken in the period 2006-2008:

→ An ATD Fourth World member was part of a "Parenting of children at risk of social exclusion" project, set up by a working group of experts from the Council of Europe's Forum for Children and Families. Special emphasis was given to the voices of families faced with poverty and social exclusion. This included ATD Fourth World delegates from the UK with experience of being parents and living in poverty meeting the Working Group. Their contribution went towards the formulation of recommendations introduced at the Conference of Family Ministers in Lisbon in May 2006.

→ In 2007, ATD Fourth World and the Extreme Poverty and Social Cohesion Grouping organised a workshop, «Ending

Extreme Poverty, a Road to Peace», attended by, among others, the Council's Deputy Secretary General and the Commissioner for Human Rights. Those attending included people living in extreme poverty from France, Germany, Moldova, Romania and Russia.

→ In January 2006, a collective complaint lodged against the French Government by the International Movement ATD Fourth World (see fiche 2, «Developing a Culture of Human Rights»).

→ **European Convention on Human Rights.** Between 2006 and 2008, two separate petitions were submitted by families supported by the ATD Fourth World. One of these petitions is currently before the European



Court of Human Rights; a decision is expected at the end of 2010.

In addition to ATD Fourth World permanent delegations to

European institutions, ATD Fourth World's teams maintain a presence in 12 European countries and are in regular contact with other organisations

in another five countries. **Below are several examples of the activities undertaken in Europe during the period 2006 - 2009.**



## European Solidarity Caravans

Between June and October 2007, over 70 young people from across Europe travelled from Spain to Poland in 9 different countries as part of a European Solidarity Caravan, part-funded by the European Commission. Coming themselves from very different different social and cultural backgrounds, they organised debates, festivals, performances, videos and exhibitions in order to promote solidarity and an end to poverty and exclusion. In each of the nearly 70 public place where the caravans stopped, they strived to reach local people and particularly those facing extreme poverty – through a simple conversation, a game of football, playing music together, dancing or painting. In total 9000 people took part in activities organised by the Caravans. One of the outcomes of the project

was to enable communities to come together around a common purpose of welcoming and discovering the young people who had come to share with them their passion and commitment for a more inclusive and fairer society.

*“Neighbours who had lived next door to each other for twenty years finally found courage and time to really meet, people who had once been friends and fallen*

*out tentatively explored the possibility of a future and I know of at least one family that took the very brave step of joining in with the community for the first time. Everywhere the universal language of laughter, music and the stomp of skipping and dancing feet prevailed.”* Young person part of the European Solidarity Caravan project.

## Reaching the poorest through ‘Street Libraries’ in Poland

ATD Fourth World has been present in Poland through links with organisations with a common cause for many years and has had a team of full-time volunteers in Warsaw since 2006. At the beginning of 2008, a

street libraries project was initiated, developed from the principle of reaching out towards the aspirations of the community with the aim of sharing knowledge, always prioritising the participation of the most

vulnerable children and community members. Initially time and energy was set aside to locate those areas where the street libraries would take place, form team of volunteers willing to facilitate the sessions and organise training for those wishing to get involved. The street libraries themselves began in April 2008 in four places across Poland in both rural and urban settings. In one area, the street library is in a centre for Chechen migrants awaiting their immigration status, with some 350 families crammed together in a block of flats. The street

library takes place between 12:30 and 2:00; to target those who do not go to school. Although the majority do not speak Polish, the street library offers them books so that the children can get to know the language of the country. Two other street libraries take place in an isolated section of the Warsaw neighbourhood of Praga, the 8 facilitators undertaking the same walk across railway tracks as the families who live there. The parents, who initially kept their distance, now come up and offer their support and their ideas.

With the launch of the street library project, other individuals, communities and organisations have contacted the ATD Fourth World team with their own stories. One mother from western Poland wrote, *"I live in a village where a number of families were rehoused in the building I live in because they hadn't paid their rent. Many of the children don't read books at home. Last year, during the holidays, I got all the children together and read to them. They liked it so much that I hope to do the same again this year. Books are magic. All children should be able to enjoy some of that magic."*

## **"Voices for a Change" – Involving people in poverty in research: London, UK**

ATD Fourth World aims to enable the voice and knowledge of people living in poverty to be heard and acted upon. The Voices for a Change project, which ran between 2007 and 2008, involved training adults living in poverty as peer researchers and to become spokespeople on behalf of those experiencing poverty. The aim of this participatory peer research project was to make policy recommendations to local and central government policy-makers with a poverty and social exclusion remit, informed by the knowledge of people with first-hand experience of poverty. Involved in every step of the project, from drafting the interview guide through to analysing the data, the peer researchers' first-hand knowledge of poverty allowed them to look at the findings in light of their own experience and formulate recommendations that matched what would make a difference to their own lives. They faced many obstacles to participation because of the complications of living in

poverty themselves; for instance, having to deal with welfare benefits being stopped or having to lay out the fare money to get to meetings despite all their travel costs being refunded when they arrived. A pace was set that allowed all peer researchers to feel comfortable with their role. The confidence and skills they gained from the project has enabled the researchers themselves to move on. One researcher, who now has a part-time job with a training organisation, said: *"Do not underestimate the need for confidence building. I definitely feel able to take the skills gained (from the project), such as speaking, listening and team work, and to apply them in another setting."*



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