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Конференција посветена на вработените,
а сиромашни граѓани.
15.09.2017, Даре Цамбаз, Скопје

Report from the National preparation of European PeP meeting 2017.

Macedonian National Conference

"Working just to get by"

On 15th October 2017, at Dare Dzambaz - House of Humanitarian Organizations, Skopje, was held Conference dedicated to in-work poverty and working poor citizens. This event with title "Working just to get by" was organized by Macedonian Anti-Poverty Platform, supported by European Anti-Poverty Network and co-supported by Friedrich Ebert office in Skopje and Federation of farmers in the Republic of Macedonia.

This kind of conference is organized for the sixth time and the goal is to make it possible to hear the voice of People Experiencing Poverty and give them the opportunity to present their problems and needs personally in front of governmental and non-governmental representatives. Through this way of work, active participation and inclusion of these people in a democratic debate is promoted, which should give solutions for a better life for all citizens.

This year, conference was attended by 120 participants, poor people, working poor people, representatives from various Civil Society Organizations, International organizations, Institutions and for the first time, highest representatives from the Ministry of of Labor and Social Policy and Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Macedonia.

The focus of the discussion was put at overcoming and expanding the traditionally accepted concept that poor people are the only ones who do not have a job and those who have low salaries. Except for them, we talk about the people who work, but are not registered (grey economy), the uncertain employment (with short-term contracts, seasonal or part-time engagements) and for those who are



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the only employed in numerous families. We touch issues about workers' rights, as well as the safety and security of jobs.

Conference was open by **Biljana Dukovska, President of MAPP** which says “Unfortunately, we are experiencing and witnessing the hardships of this difficult period in which people work and are paid just to get by.” After her short greeting speech has **Ivana Vuckova, FES Macedonia** and she send message that “It is necessary to redefine the old concept that poor people are only people who do not work or people with low income, by only reducing unemployment we are not reducing poverty. It is necessary to treat this problem very seriously and through an equal and genuine society and through tightening the gap that exists between the rich and the poor.”

Discussions were divided in two panels, in which participate different stakeholders and each have 3 to 5 minutes to give short speech. Other time was reserved for questions and evidence from the people in the audience.

At first panel **Sashko Jovanov, MAPP's National PeP coordinator** says “Poor employed citizens is a state of poverty which affects people despite the fact that they are employed. If your monthly income is 10 080 MKD or 9000 MKD and you bring it to your family and then split it among 4 family members it is not enough. Hence, we can't talk about a dignified and quality life.” After him speaks **Mariela Jasharova, working and poor person**, and tell her story. “In the past 9 years I haven't had any kind of health insurance nor do I have retirement insurance nor do I have disability insurance, although I am a single mother and I think that that is a huge non-sense. I get one salary every 5 months and the second on another 5 months and the third on 7 months and you cannot survive with that kind of payment method under the circumstance where I live. And even though I can wait for the payment, the electricity and water bills can't. And this keeps going and going for the past 9 years.” That inspires our next panelist, **Tamara Chausidis, from Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers** to say “I am 52years and I am a freelancer and I have three years working experience. I know very well when I talk about this kind of job. Lately there is a modern term and the



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“Marvelous job”, which means insecurity and gives insecure beneficial work time to the employee even though you practically work. That which is a serious change in the global community but in Macedonia is a trend, is that that type of work is getting bigger and the young people are the ones that are affected the most. It is more common that the employment contract is lasting only a month and a half or three.” **Dragi Celevski , Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Macedonia** said “Social security is a very important area, first of all it will be appropriate to build a system of social security for the poorest citizens and an access to non-institutional and Institutional care.” This panel was finished with addressing of **Mila Carovska, Minister of Labor and Social Policy of the Republic of Macedonia**. “220 000 employees In Macedonia or every 3rd employee is employed and poor. Other statistic says that in 2015 according to other indicators from Euro stat, 8,9% of the employed in Macedonia are poor. Employees who counts salary and are insured but again live under the poverty line, because at the moment our minimum wage not below the poverty line. The minimum wage of 10,000 MKD is about 2,000 MKD lower than the poverty line. Because 4 household members in Macedonia should receive a salary of 12 000 MKD to be able to be above the poverty line every month.

In following open discussion one person said “I am employed with a salary of 11 000 MKD, I am homeless and I have trouble because I'm on the street, it's hard for me”. Other said “The biggest problem for us is the so-called seasonal employees - unemployed people. They are lonely citizens who are outside of our system, they have minimal incomes per month, they do not have health and pension insurance, and we are not able to get them out of poverty“. “I am 52 years old with only 3 years of working experience“. He was seriously concerned about his further life. The person expressed the need for greater equity and serious commitment of the institutions to improve the quality of life and the personal integrity of the citizens. "The more a person is poorer, the more he is vulnerable to corruption and pressures. Inequality becomes unbearable, dramatic and selfish.“ he concluded.



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During the short break for coffee and networking, many media were interested for statements. Some of the working poor people we recorded and got time in main news that day.

The second panel was open by **Branimir Jovanovik, Cabinet of Minister of Finance of the Republic of Macedonia**. "Macedonia has the highest rate of poverty according to every indicator. According to the indicator that is called relative poverty 22% of the people in Macedonia live in poverty. According to the indicator of how many people are at risk to be in poverty is somewhere around 40% of the population in Macedonia. According to the most serious indicator, people who live with under 3 dollars per day in Macedonia is 9% of the population or 180 000 people. So that means that 180 000 people live with less than a 100 den. per day, that is the highest rate in Europe. Poverty can't be solved with research or part time activist actions, poverty can be solved with the instruments of the Government." he accent. After him **Biljana Petrovska Mitrevska, Federation of Farmers of the Republic of Macedonia** speaks about rural poverty. "According to the family income what I want to emphasize is that the farmers are on the second level of poverty. Why is it like that? Because farmers earn directly from the agricultural economy. By a single climate change which are acquiring in this time such as droughts, storms, floods their entire economy is destroyed. Unfortunately, the farmers are starting to become poor people and they have non-guaranteed placement, lower purchase price and higher costs which increase farmers poverty." **Dimitar Ilchov, working poor person** give some reality-check and said "I am regularly employed, I get paid but I am still at the edge of poverty, I have financial problems. So that means I cannot live like the "normal" citizens in the socio-economic system." **Emil Krstanovski, International Labour Organization in Macedonia** touch issues connected with minimum wage and working rights. "The level of minimum wage will increase to 12 000 MKD and if we take into consideration that 1\3 of the people in Macedonia make less than 12 000 MKD we think that it is the first step to decreasing the number of people living in poverty, because poverty can simply decrease there where inequality is decreasing. Equality is one of the main tools in wide application of the minimum wage. ILO is pleased to see that one of the recommendations that we had to minimize the discrimination of the workers in the textile industry is removed with this legal solution." As last speaker **Valentina Disoska, Association**



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of Business Women. She opened issues which is not common among citizens. “I will emphasize the one situation that was not mentioned and that is the entrepreneurial poverty. Do not think that the ones who dared to be entrepreneurs are blooming, at least not in the woman section and not in the micro and small segment. Very often we could not cover our costs, we cannot cover our fees, we can not give ourselves a paycheck, that is that segment that we call entrepreneurial poverty.”

Big discussion was opened from the audience and many questions rise for panelists. One person said “I have nothing to live with and I have nothing to eat, my parents are deceased and institutions just send me from one to another door”. Other just continue “I’m a person who doesn’t have a home. Live in a tent. I’m with a low education, I collect plastic bottles and paper so that I can feed my wife and our nine children”. Then representative from the Macedonian Nannies Association said “It is necessary to solve the status of caregivers working with children at home. They work for years without health and pension insurance and with minimal wages.” She presented problems they faced during their work, emphasizing the need for additional measures that would result in the eradication of the gray economy in this area, too. One woman from Federation of Farmers of the Republic of Macedonia said “I am concerned about rural poverty and the problems faced by rural farmers who receive the only income from the sale of agricultural products, which has been experiencing a serious decline in recent years, as well as the problems of rural women and their unrecognized labor as seasonal workers”. Some person suggest that “Poverty lies in the private sector and in inadequate education. We need urgent reforms in the education system.” Present representative from the Helsinki Committee - LGBTQ Support Center said „We need real active employment measures, not just measures that will be further used for points. The bulk of the LGBT community has no trust in social policies that guarantee community protection, and in practice there is no real implementation.“

Many different opinions were exposed. Someone said “We must begin to think about reducing the gap between rural and urban areas, fighting corruption and crime and respecting workers' rights at all levels”. One SCO's representative said “In the process of integration from social case to employee, it is necessary for citizens to continue to receive social transfers from institutions in order to



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overcome the fear and dependence of social cases from social transfers, but all this being precisely defined and time limited by in order to prevent greater misuse of state funds, and on the other hand would provide faster integration of persons who for a long time received minimal financial assistance, while also being included in the gray economy market“. Than other working poor person said “Because of the dependence on social transfers, citizens are afraid to be involved in the labor market“.

Instead of conclusion it is worthy to mention that days after conference we receive great support to continue with this kind of work, involving people with problems into direct policy creation and give them opportunity to speak in public by themselves. Many congratulations and sharing of the event was done by social media.

Sashko Jovanov

National PeP coordinator

Macedonian Anti-Poverty Platform (EAPN Macedonia)

