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| **No 71 /2015** | **1 December 2015** |

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**Honouring real anti-poverty champions, European Civil Society says time to make stand against poverty in the European Union**

**The Irish organization Third Age** **recognised for welcoming migrants and refugees to Ireland by giving them English conversation classes**

More than 120 million people in the EU face the risk of poverty or social exclusion[[1]](#footnote-1). Grassroots organisations working to alleviate poverty in **Ireland, Finland, Germany, France and Poland** show the way in providing direct assistance to those in need. The European Economic and Social Committee has dedicated the 2015 European Civil Society Prize to organisations distinguishing themselves through their creativity and success in combatting poverty.

Poverty and social exclusion includes many multi-faceted challenges such as housing, health, education, access to employment, indebtedness and addiction, to name but a few. Civil society organisations across the European Union are actively addressing these issues. Activities often focus on local needs and – crucially – directly involve people experiencing poverty themselves in their implementation.

"The right to a decent life is a fundamental human right and poverty undermines all aspects of well-being in society, including education, long-term health, and family relationships. It damages the future potential of individuals and the whole community. Civil society organisations across the European Union are struggling to address poverty during these difficult financial times. In awarding the 2015 Civil Society Prize, the EESC is recognising outstanding initiatives which are making a difference in combating poverty in Europe", said EESC President George Dassis.

Five projects were chosen from a list of over 100 wide ranging and high calibre project submissions:

* [Fáilte Isteach](http://www.thirdageireland.ie/failte-isteach), nominated by EESC Member Seamus Boland, an initiative of [Third Age](http://www.thirdageireland.ie/) (Ireland), is a community based project where **older volunteers welcome migrants and refugees to Ireland through giving English conversation classes.** Each week more than 2,200 students – migrants, asylum seekers and refugees – benefit from tuition from over 750 volunteers.
* [Y-Foundation (Finland)](http://www.ysaatio.fi/in-english/) nominated by the European Federation of National Organisations working with homeless (FEANTSA), promotes health and social welfare through provision of affordable, **good quality rental housing** while respecting the human dignity of people who have difficulty finding accommodation on the open housing market. The main groups benefiting from these efforts are the homeless and people at risk of becoming homeless. Y-Foundation has also developed and supported housing for young people and people suffering from mental health or addiction problems.
* [Armut und Gesundheit](http://www.armut-gesundheit.de/) in Deutschland (Germany), nominated by EESC Member Gabriele Bischoff, provides **comprehensive medical care for homeless people**, a walk-in clinic for patients without health insurance in unstable situation and various other initiatives. One project, the “Street Jumper” also promotes good health among children and young people from deprived backgrounds.
* [Uniterres](http://epiceries-solidaires.viabloga.com/news/le-programme-uniterres-explique-en-video), an initiative of [A.N.D.E.S.](http://www.epiceries-solidaires.org/) (France), nominated by EESC Member Evelyne Pichenot, provides fresh, quality local produce **to social and solidarity-based food shops** **by local producers of fruits, vegetables, herbs and eggs**. These products are available to vulnerable people and food aid recipients in the social and solidarity-based shops on a self-service basis, at no more than 30% of their purchase price. Uniterres currently supports 124 farmers in the Poitou-Charentes, Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées and Brittany regions, supplies 53 social and solidarity shops, providing food aid to 20 000 beneficiaries each year.
* [Social Integration Centres](http://barka.org.pl/category/dzialania-i-projekty/centrum-integracji-spolecznej), which are an initiative of [Barka Foundation for Mutual Help](http://barka.org.pl/) (Poland), nominated by Comité européen de coordination (CEC), address issues of **education and vocational training for long-term unemployed** individuals, including the disabled, ex-prisoners, refugees and addicts. The Social Integration Centres organise workshops for professional requalification, educational courses and support groups.

According to Ms Jean Lambert MEP, one of the four assessors[[2]](#footnote-2); : "What we can see is that there is a range of issues which are drawing more and more attention – issues to do with homelessness or food. Some of these were in a way quite shocking because they show that we are still failing to meet basic human needs and human rights."

Representatives of the winning organisations will travel to Brussels on 10 December to attend the award ceremony where the ranking of the projects will be announced and the awards given by EESC President, Georges Dassis. EUR 50 000 will be shared among the five winning projects, with the intention that this money will be reinvested in projects providing further care in the community.

The Civil Society Prize jury comprised the EESC President, the two EESC Vice-Presidents, the President of the Employers' Group, the President of the Various Interests Group, a member of the Workers' Group, and the EESC Secretary-General. The jury chose the five winners, based on a shortlist of eleven, put together by four member external expert panel.

In recent years, the EESC has taken many initiatives in favour of poverty eradication. The EESC has submitted formal opinions to the EU institutions and organised many events. These have targeted issues such as poverty reduction and child poverty, measures to reduce social exclusion, the growing problem of the "working poor", the introduction of a minimum income at European level, fairer taxation, and the need to include social measures when planning and implementing EU policies in areas like the single market and the single currency.

The Civil Society Prize, now in its seventh year, is awarded for “excellence in civil society initiatives”. Each year, the prize covers a different aspect of the EESC’s activities. The 2014 prize was dedicated to civil society organisations working to integrate Roma communities.

Further details about the 2015 Civil Society Prize are available [here](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/civilsocietyprize).

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*The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process. The Committee has 350 members from across Europe, who are appointed by the Council of the European Union.*

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1. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe\_2020\_indicators\_-\_poverty\_and\_social\_exclusion [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ms Jean Lambert, MEP, Mr Stefan Olsson, European Commission Director, Ms Maureen O'Neill, Former SOC section president and Ms Anne Van Lancker, former MEP [↑](#footnote-ref-2)