

The human cost of austerity: Poor people paying for a crisis they did not cause

Caritas Europa's new report on the impact of crisis reveals disturbing levels of poverty and deprivation in the seven EU countries worst hit by the economic crisis; Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

The EU and its Member States continue to address the ongoing crisis by focusing mainly on economic policies – at the expenses of social policies. As a result, the policies put in place are having a devastating impact on the people of Europe, notably in the seven countries worst affected. The failure of the EU and its Member States to provide concrete support on the scale required to assist those experiencing difficulties, to protect essential public services and create employment, is likely to prolong the crisis.

The report [“The European Crisis and its Human Cost – A Call for Fair Alternatives and Solutions”](#) – is the second annual edition in a series of in-depth examination of the human impact that austerity policies are having on people in the EU. It also documents the growing number of people struggling with poverty and social exclusion.

The report depicts **an unfair Europe**, where social risks are increasing, social systems are being downsized and individuals and families are under stress. It shows a Europe where the social cohesion is fading out and where people's trust on the political institutions is increasingly weakening. This creates a risk for Europe on a greater, long-term scale.

With the report, Caritas Europa strongly challenges the official discourse suggesting that the worst of the economic crisis is over. **The crisis is not over. Current political choices are having extremely negative impact** on vulnerable people, and are pushing many others into **poverty for the first time**.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The report's conclusions are based on the unique grass-roots life testimonies that Caritas organisations are witnessing through their work with people experiencing poverty.

Its **principal conclusion** is that the policy of **prioritising austerity is not working** and that an alternative approach should be adopted, such as putting in place benchmarks which assess the social impact of proposed economic measures before implementing them.

Authorities do have choices. They can decide what policy approaches to use and who to target with them, basing their decision on fairness and justice.

The report clearly shows how poor people are – after over 5 years of economic crisis – still paying for a crisis they didn't cause. Poor people are getting poorer.

[The report](#) concludes with clear recommendations towards major decision makers and stakeholders; EU-Institutions, national/regional authorities, and civil society organisations.

Jorge Nuño Mayer, Secretary General of Caritas Europa says:

“We believe that this report can contribute to more awareness of the impact of the crisis on the vulnerable groups. It confirms the calls for alternative policy solutions. **Politicians have choices when deciding which measures must be taken to alleviate the worst effects of the crisis.** The world documented in this report is not just. Moreover, the prioritisation of austerity measures has not solved the crisis but caused social problems that will have lasting impacts.”

Sylvana Rapti – Member of the European Parliament, says:

"The Caritas Study, once again and particularly this year that the social impact of the crisis is more obvious than ever, makes a difference. It goes beyond the mere analysis of the present situation. It's not just about facts, figures and forecasts. **This invaluable study manages to merge expertise with sensitivity and stands for clearly articulated solutions** which activate the society by putting human at its core. This is what we need today: Solutions, real changes, which improve ordinary people's lives and secure the dignity of the most vulnerable ones. The only way to cultivate again the “Elpis” (meaning 'hope' in Greek) for Europe is to revive solidarity and integration."

Note to the Editor

[Caritas Europa](#) is a network of 49 Caritas organisations in 46 European countries. Caritas Europa has a heartfelt commitment to analyse and fight poverty and social exclusion; and to promote true integral human development, social justice and sustainable social systems in Europe and throughout the world. Caritas Europa advocates for, and with, people in need in order to transform society into a more just and inclusive civilisation.

Caritas organisations are on the ground in the seven countries examined. They address the challenges being faced by those who are vulnerable on a daily basis. Caritas Europa member organisations across Europe witness poverty, unemployment, exclusion, mounting distress and despair among increasing number of people who rely on their services. Their work ranges from the provision of basic necessities such as food and clothing to the poorest, to language classes for recently arrived migrants, to micro-credit or micro-loans made to families and to small businesses, to offering training to help create new businesses or social co-operatives.

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Press contact:

Thorfinnur Omarsson

Public Information Officer

T: +32 (0)2 2350394

M: +32 (0)473341393

tomarsson@caritas.eu

<http://www.caritas.eu>

