

Article for: GOLDEN BEGGAR NEWS

Special focus: The role of filmmakers in tackling poverty

2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and to mark this important programme, the European Commission has teamed up with the organisers of the 16th Kosice Festival of Local Televisions to throw the spotlight on these critical social issues and see what role the media and filmmakers can play in raising public awareness.

Poverty and social exclusion is a daily reality in most cities in Europe. Among the public there is generally a lack of understanding about the extent of the problem and lack of awareness that help is needed.

Indeed the statistics are quite startling: the number of people living below the poverty line in the European Union is estimated to be more than 80 million.

Not everyone has the same idea about what it means to be poor. Some 22% of Europeans see it as not being able to afford the basic goods to live on; 21% believe it is about having to depend on charity or public subsidies. While 24% think people are poor when they cannot fully participate in society because their resources are so limited.

Nearly three quarters of European citizens on average believe that poverty is widespread in their country. This figure is particularly high in Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. This perception is close to reality, as the highest rates of poverty in the EU are recorded in the same three countries according to a recent survey (Eurostat).

Eight in ten Europeans think that poverty has increased in their country in the last three years, a result which seems to reflect citizens' uncertainties during this time of economic crisis.

In its most visible form, poverty can mean not having somewhere to live or food to eat. It can also mean not having the resources to fulfil simple everyday demands of life such as going to the dentist when you have toothache, or being able to send your child on a school trip.

This type of poverty can lead to social exclusion as people are unable to join in everyday activities that are often taken for granted by the rest of society.

The European Commission believes it is important to increase public awareness of the many forms of poverty and social exclusion that exist and inspire people to work together to combat them. Increased awareness among people at local and national levels can help build partnerships and generate a new impetus in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion. Seeing those in poverty as individuals with a human story is a first step in changing attitudes and breaking stereotypes, a crucial step toward social inclusion.

The media and TV in particular is an important bridge between those desperately in need and the people who can help them.

Local TV has a different and an important role to that of national television in identifying and reporting about groups in need in their local area. The involvement of local TV and media can raise awareness at the grass roots level and help trigger effective action.

At the Kosice Local Film festival, a group of TV journalists and stakeholders - including EU and national government officials - is being brought together for a special panel session dedicated to "Reporting on Poverty and Social Exclusion".

The discussion will focus on the press and the poor and how they can work together and also how media can act as a catalyst for social inclusion.

It will look at how media and TV can bring support to EU efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion.

The discussion will include the well-known Polish dancer and choreographer **Michal Piróg**, who has volunteered to be an ambassador for the European campaign to combat poverty and social inclusion. Other panel members from government and media will include **Elodie Fazi** (European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Brussels), **Nadežda Šebová**, (Slovak Ministry of labour, social affairs and the family), **Gizela Brutovská** (FF UPJŠ), **Dusiča Davidovič** (Nis City Council, Serbia, in charge of social care policy), **Kristina Magdolenova** (Roma press agency), **Viera Dubačová**, theatre director and Slovak ambassador for the European Year. The moderator will be **Samo Kolár** (independent journalist).

Special EU Award for film makers

As a further encouragement to local film directors to help combat poverty and social exclusion, a Special Award has been offered by the European Commission for TV productions which promote these key issues.

The Award will be decided by the Kosice Festival Jury led by the U.S. producer Ed Baumeister (formerly CBS News) which will select the winner on the basis of the following selection criteria:

- Entry must be from one of the 27 EU member states (plus the EEA states of Iceland and Norway)
- The theme of the entry must be poverty and social exclusion
- The entry must have an EU dimension and EU relevance
- The entry has to show solutions and best practice.

The award will be presented on 12 June by a European Commission representative. The winner will receive an inscribed sculpture, a voucher worth 1,500 euro and also a certificate personally signed by European Commissioner Lazlo Andor.

In addition to actions such as the Special Award for film makers, the European Commission is involved across Europe in a range of awareness-raising campaigns, information sessions in schools, roundtable discussions and training for the media and for decision-makers.

The European Union believes in the importance of collective responsibility in combating poverty. Whilst this doubtless involves decision-makers, it also calls for a response from other people in the public and private sectors, and amongst communicators working in television and the media.

The European Commission believes that we can only win the fight against poverty and social exclusion if we all work together.

For further information:
www.2010againstpoverty.eu

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