

**Official Event
Plenary Session**

Full Paper

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First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the organizers and the Mayor of Gwangju for their invitation to this forum and for granting me the opportunity to present the city of Marseille's unwavering commitment to addressing poverty today.

Our top priority is to transform Marseille into a city that upholds human rights, a welcoming and hospitable place, where the welfare of humanity lies at the core of its development.

Every policy we enact is aimed at promoting genuine equality among all our residents and nurturing a vital sense of community for the betterment of our society, which is an urgent necessity.

Marseille, as the second-largest city in France, has been plagued by stark inequalities and entrenched poverty for an extended period. To grasp the challenges we confront, it is vital to consider some key statistics.

Our city is home to nearly one million inhabitants, with over a quarter of them living below the poverty line, a figure nearly 10 points higher than the French national average. The following quarter is perilously close to joining them.

In recent years, we have observed the resurgence of slums, a phenomenon we believed France had eradicated over three decades ago. Today, it affects over 7,000 people, in addition to the 15,000 individuals who declare themselves homeless at least once annually.

This dire situation has worsened due to crises mentioned previously: the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, escalating housing costs, increased expenses for basic necessities, and energy prices.

These crises have left millions more vulnerable, pushing them into extreme poverty or even destitution. Although the term may be unsettling in a developed nation, it is a reality we must confront head-on to effectively address it.

Local governments and cities play a pivotal role in shaping social policies, managing the reception of migrants, and safeguarding human rights. When fundamental human rights, such as access to food, water, healthcare, education, and housing are compromised, it affects all aspects of human rights.

Therefore, over the past three years, we have embarked on an extensive action plan to alleviate inequalities and combat extreme poverty, which is undermining our city and affecting countless lives.

Unfortunately, time constraints prevent me from providing a comprehensive overview. Hence, I will offer a general outline while highlighting specific actions and target populations.

Our overarching framework centers on equal rights for all, commencing from a very young age, with special emphasis on children. This entails a dedicated commitment to their education, academic achievements, and extracurricular development, which includes:

- Enrolling every child in school, irrespective of their status, place of residence, or their parents' financial circumstances.
- Offering free school meals to combat food insecurity from an early age, especially for the most vulnerable families.
- Providing free access to cultural and sports facilities for children and their accompanying adults.

Simultaneously, we extend special attention to the elderly, who face exceptionally high poverty rates and challenges in accessing their rights. We have established dedicated social support teams to address the issues they encounter.

In order to strengthen human rights and promote genuine equality, we have implemented a unique poverty plan in France, with an additional budget of nearly 2 million euros. This is in addition to our overall budget of 25 million euros for social policies, aimed at bolstering partnerships with associations and other public authorities to enhance our capacity to take action.

This plan, subject to annual review and adjustment according to needs, primarily focuses on developing social support for the most vulnerable individuals and meeting their fundamental needs, particularly access to food and water.

Today, in France and especially in Marseille, we are confronted with a reality that was once considered a distant memory: hunger. Hunger affects nearly one in three individuals who report daily deprivation of food due to financial constraints.

Therefore, the city has initiated an unprecedented action plan to address the needs of hundreds of thousands of residents by:

- Providing daily free food distributions by our teams to homeless individuals.
- Offering enhanced support to associations engaged in food distributions.
- Distributing free meals to students.
- Supplying food vouchers to the most impoverished individuals, particularly single mothers with children, for whom we have initiated a dedicated support plan worth one million euros.

Food access is not our sole concern. We are also committed to ensuring access to water and hygiene. This commitment led to the establishment of the city's first public showers three years ago, particularly during the peak of the COVID-19 crisis, when thousands of people lacked access to showers or toilets in our city.

These policies come with financial costs, and occasionally, they can be politically challenging. However, their primary goal is to mitigate inequalities, even though France possesses an effective social safety net. Nevertheless, this system has its limitations, and the influence of neoliberal policies over the past three decades has considerably weakened its capacity to prevent extreme poverty from emerging in specific areas.

This weakening is evident in the decline of public services, which are considered a shared asset for those who do not have access to them, as articulated by Jean Jaurès. These services should help alleviate inequalities.

That's why the policies implemented by the municipality, such as the expansion of shower facilities, now constitute a free municipal public service with unconditional access. In other words, anyone in need, regardless of their financial means or administrative status, can utilize these facilities.

In conclusion, I would like to touch upon the issue of welcoming and integrating migrants. Marseille is a port city that opens onto the Mediterranean sea, and our history is characterized by the migrations of people escaping poverty or conflict. It remains a city known for those seeking a better life.

Hence, there is a compelling need to facilitate their integration, as all too often in our country, migration is associated with poverty and a lack of rights.

We consider anyone residing in Marseille to be a citizen of the city, and our policies are directed at all our residents. Consequently, we have launched an active reception policy, with a particular focus on facilitating access to rights and accommodations.

Through our poverty plan, we are combatting homelessness by creating over 300 accommodation spaces within the municipal heritage over the past three years. A significant proportion of these spaces is earmarked for the accommodation of women and children.

Additionally, we have entered into an agreement with the French state to eradicate squats and slums by establishing dedicated reception facilities for the populations residing there. This includes a particular focus on the Romani community, which faces significant discrimination in our country, and for whom few support measures currently exist.

In just a few months, the first integration village following the evacuation of Marseille's largest and oldest slum will become operational. This village will provide reception and social support to 80 individuals.

The journey has been long and challenging, but it is indispensable to enable everyone

to lead dignified lives in Marseille and reduce the social inequalities that have plagued our city for far too long.

We firmly believe that access to housing is a fundamental right, without which it is exceedingly difficult to make progress, and that all residents of our city are entitled to it without discrimination, regardless of their income or background.

Finally, we are convinced that access to rights is a fundamental lever for integration and inclusion. Currently, it remains unduly complex for thousands of vulnerable individuals.

Through the examples of public policies cited, our objective is to develop actions that reach the most disadvantaged populations, enabling them to benefit from effective, long-term social support.

Thank you for your kind attention.