

March Newsletter

Dear friends of the Zero Poverty campaign,

February has been a memorable month. It has been the first month of real campaigning across Europe and also saw what will surely be one of the highlights of the year in the form of the Holy Father's visit to a Caritas project in Rome. In celebration of this momentous occasion, other bishops across Europe also took advantage of this event to reaffirm their own commitment to the principles of Christian charity.

Now that the campaign is well and truly up and running, it is up to all of us to maintain the momentum in order to ensure that this is a year of lasting change.

Holy Father's Visit to Roma Termini Hostel



'Benedict XVI's tears are the symbol that best conveys the meaning of the Holy Father's visit to Caritas's shelter at Termini station in Rome' said Giovanni Maria Vian, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *l'Osservatore Romano*. And indeed it was impossible not to be moved by the conditions that people living in the hostel – the poor, immigrants, Roma people - had persevered through.

The date chosen; 14th February, was symbolic. Not only did it mark the 23rd anniversary of the hostel's modernisation, it also was the feast day of SS Cyril and Methodius, patron saints of Europe. It was an appropriate day therefore to reflect on what we as inhabitants of this continent can do to aid our fellow human beings.

The Holy Father emphasised that the purpose of the visit was not just to encourage Catholics to pursue good works, but *'every person of good character'*. He reserved particular thanks for the volunteers of the hostel, without whom, *'nothing would be possible'*.

In a world in which, as the Holy Father pointed out, *'the logic of profit and self-interest seems to dominate'*, Benedict XVI's visit was a welcome reminder that different priorities are

possible and provided inspiration and hope for all who believe that a different future is achievable.

Events Related to Holy Father's Visit to Roma Termini



Taking up the Holy Father's initiative, Caritas and the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) encouraged bishops in Europe to undertake similar initiatives on or around 14 February. The invitation was enthusiastically taken up across Europe.

Over 60 dioceses organised visits to Caritas projects. In Luxembourg, for example, Mgr Fernand Franck visited a reception centre for persons experiencing poverty and social exclusion (pictured). A non-exhaustive list of similar activities can be found on the [Caritas Europa website](#).

These events were widely reported in the media giving much needed recognition to people across Europe who have dedicated precious time and energy to helping those less fortunate than themselves.

Launch Events Across Europe



A number of countries launched their national campaigns in February, including [Croatia](#), [Germany](#), and [Portugal](#). Bosnia Herzegovina also launched their new [website](#). In Croatia, both the President Ivo Josipovic (pictured) and the Mayor of Zagreb Milan Bandic were in attendance, giving high level support to the Zero Poverty campaign. The Portuguese launch event was also attended by very senior figures such as Alfredo José de Sousa, the Justice Ombudsman, João de Deus, the President of the Portuguese Trade Union Congress (UGT) and Domingos Simões Pereira, the General Secretary of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP).

Reports from national Caritas organisations indicate that the campaign has struck a chord with quite a few influential people across Europe. The more we keep up our efforts, the greater the chances that we can achieve lasting change at a political level.

Zero Poverty Events in February



February saw a number special initiatives organised in European countries as part of the wider campaign. Austria for example organised an Action Day to showcase their [‘Coffee to Help’](#) initiative (mug pictured). The aim of the event was to promote Fairtrade products and raise money for development projects via the highly sociable act of drinking coffee together. In order to organise maximum visibility, people dressed up as mugs of coffee and coffee bags and walked through a number of Austrian towns.

In [Bosnia Herzegovina](#), an educational programme was launched for social workers, while [Armenia](#) opened a centre for elderly people living in poverty and experiencing social exclusion and a centre for young people who are growing up in poverty. Updates on events taking place across Europe can be regularly found on both the [Zero Poverty](#) website and the [Caritas Europa](#) website.

Coming Up in March



If January was the month that the ball got rolling for this campaign and February the month where the ball began to gather speed, then March is the month where things will really begin to accelerate. [Secours Catholique](#) in France will be taking advantage of the ‘France for Europe’ week from 4-10 March to launch discussions at a local and national level about the European dimension of combating poverty. [Caritas Malta](#) will be launching its campaign and its official campaign song Issa f’idejk (Now it’s in your hands) on 17 March. [Caritas Ambrosiana](#) in Italy will also launch its campaign in March, on the 12th of the month.

Other highlights include the workshops that [Caritas in Germany](#) is organising in Berlin to discuss poverty and avenues for social inclusion and Caritas Europa’s major capacity building seminar on HIV/AIDS which will be held in Sofia, Bulgaria.

This is however just a fraction of the many events going on around Europe. For more information on Zero Poverty events, please contact your local Caritas organisation.

Petition



Please remember to ask your family, friends and colleagues to sign the [Petition Against Poverty](#). The paper version of the petition is doing particularly well, with Albania, Croatia, Italy, Spain and Portugal reporting thousands of signatures.

If you too would like to download a paper copy of the petition, copies are available in English on the Zero Poverty site. Please feel free to adapt the paper petition to your local needs.

Final Words

ACT NOW

While the campaign is rapidly picking up momentum, it is worth remembering that Caritas staff and volunteers are working every day to help people in difficulty and will continue to do so after the campaign is over. This is particularly relevant in the context of the flooding that has hit Portugal, Albania and Bulgaria as well as in the context of hurricane Xynthia which devastated the West of France. For more information on how to help the victims of these natural disasters please contact your national Caritas organisation.

All that remains is to thank you all for your involvement with this campaign! Keep up the good work that you are doing and don't forget to get in touch with us if you would like us to publish one of your initiatives.

Warmest regards,

The Zero Poverty Team