

Forum: The Citizen forum on inequalities

Theme: How to reduce inequalities at different scales?

Name of citizen: Louise Ivanov

Marital status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Married/in a relationship<input checked="" type="radio"/> Single<input type="radio"/> With children, if so, how many: 4	Level of education <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Primary<input type="radio"/> Secondary<input checked="" type="radio"/> University
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1. How does the theme of inequalities concern you?

I am a 25-year-old woman from Bulgaria, and I have a master's degree in Sociology from the University of Sofia. I grew up in a middle-class family and have always seen inequality within the country. My father is a bus driver and my mother is a nurse. We lived modestly, but my parents were still able to provide me with access to education. When I finished my studies, I immediately realized how difficult it was to find a job, especially one that would allow me to live comfortably. Some of my classmates left for Germany or the Netherlands in search of better opportunities, while I am still looking for a job that matches my qualifications. The youth employment rate in Bulgaria is very low, at 18.8% in 2023.

In addition, I was forced to leave my parents to study in Sofia because of rural depopulation. There is a real difference in lifestyle between Bulgaria's big cities and rural areas, which are the poorest in Europe. Northern Bulgaria is very sparsely populated and aging; everything is concentrated in the big cities. As a result, small villages struggle to find doctors, and young people like me must leave their families to find education and then work.

Finding accommodation is also difficult because most jobs are concentrated in Sofia. Except that the price of housing (even a small studio apartment) is half or more of a graduate's salary... On top of that, the cost of living is rising: in 2024 alone, the inflation rate was 2.4%. While prices continue to rise, Bulgaria remains the country with the lowest minimum wage in the European Union. I must constantly live on the bare minimum and under stress.

I am also affected by gender inequality. As a woman, I have access to fewer job offers than men. What's more, the job market is unequal for women, as there is a gender pay gap of around 13% in my country. Even though I have a master's degree, which means I have the level of education required for many jobs, I still struggle to find work. I therefore feel justified in talking about inequality on all levels, whether it be inequality within Bulgaria or inequality based on my gender. I hope that despite these difficulties, I will eventually be able to escape this precariousness and stress.

2. What do you suggest at your level?

At my level, I try to take small steps to reduce these inequalities and help people who suffer from them. For example, I volunteer for several associations that help families living in poverty and children with their education. I think we should all get involved to the best of our ability to help the less fortunate. It costs nothing. The goal is, for example, to distribute food or give lessons to children. I believe that action is not only taken by the government and institutions, but that as citizens we can take small steps to move things forward and help each other. Participating in this conference is in line with this idea. I can make my voice heard as a citizen by proposing ideas.

In my opinion, municipalities could create affordable housing and food assistance programs for low-income youth and families so that everyone can live comfortably. In addition, the government could enforce equal pay for women and men and support young graduates through paid internships. Schools and universities should also be better funded, especially in rural areas, in order to create more human capital.