



ACTIVISTS FOR CHANGE

Participants

Carina Aaltonen, **Emmaus Åland, Finland**
Maryse Faure, **Emmaus Chalon-sur-Saône, France**
Brigitte Bousuges, Katherine Bonan, **Emmaus Longjumeau, France**
Christian Calmejane, Gérard Gineste, Manon Huard, **Emmaus Montauban, France**
Brigitte Martel-Baussant, Dominique Nave, **Emmaus Mutualisation Rhône-Alpes, France**
Jolanta Fibiga, Solvita Fibiga, Victoria Fibiga, **Amis 3, Latvia**
Arija Indrikovska, Linda, **Emmaus Smiltene, Latvia**
Arūnė Bernatonytė, **MPFSC, Lithuania**

Jeroen van Donselaar, Jos van der Meer, **Emmaus Haarzuilens, Netherlands**
Grzegorz Hadjuk, Robert Opoka, **Emmaus Brat Albert, Poland**
Marta Walkiewicz, Zbigniew Drązkowski, **Emmaus Lublin, Poland**
Grazyna Moskal, **Emmaus Rzeszów, Poland**
Artur Gostkowski, Lars Arvidsson, Robert Larsson, **Emmaus Fredriksdal, Sweden**
Vasyl Golod, **Emmaus Nasha Khata, Ukraine**
Eve Poulteau, Théo Robin, **Emmaus Europe Secretariat**

Solvita and Carina welcomed all the participants and were happy that we were finally meeting in-person.

Carina informed the meeting that Théo would be leaving Emmaus Europe and would be replaced by Emmanuel, who has already spent almost two years in an Emmaus group in Romania.

A new collective representative will be needed to support him, and it was suggested that Marta, from Emmaus Lublin, should fill this role, if the groups agree.

The meeting documents are available online:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/99c64lg2um47vm8/AACWvsWgMlrZ6PLUOfdNx29ya?dl=0>

The next collective could be held in Poland or Georgia in autumn 2022.

European solidarity in 2021 and 2022

In 2021, the usual solidarity programmes gradually resumed, while some emergency programmes were also maintained. Emmaus Oselya received funding for food aid initiatives, while Emmaus Nasha Khata was supported by the Fondation Abbé Pierre.

The European solidarity programme is supporting three initiatives, including Emmaus Brat Albert's initiative to get a new vehicle: programme details are found here: <https://emmaus-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/PROG-SO-2021-EN-Lecture-ecran.pdf>, and, for the record, the programme relies entirely on the voluntary donations made by other groups!

Applications have been invited for 2022, but it seems unlikely that the groups attending the meeting will be submitting any applications. This needs to be checked with Emmaus Geo, as their representatives were unable to attend.

Regarding international solidarity, the amount that Emmaus International collects from the annual sales is decreasing year-on-year, but all the groups attending the collective hold an annual sale.

In terms of container loads for the coming year, Emmaus Fredriksdal hopes to send a lorry load to Smiltene, six to Krakow, six to Nowy Sącz, 12 to Rzeszow, 15 to Lublin, and three-four to Amis 3, but in all likelihood, they will not be able to pay the haulage costs. It is important to remain very attentive to the quality of these container loads. As a reminder, the group is not a full member of the movement, and needs to change its operating method to meet the expectations of the Swedish

groups and Emmaus Europe and Emmaus International with regard to respect for the Emmaus values.

World Assembly

The world assembly is held every four years and brings together the movement's 425 groups. The assembly is the opportunity to elect Emmaus International's chair and decide on policy directions. The 2020 WA was postponed and will take place in two phases, a videoconference from 30/11 – 2/12/21, and then in Uruguay in May 2022. The Uruguay meeting is important, as just one WA has taken place outside of Europe, and there has never been one in South America (despite a failed attempt), which is a historic place for the movement following Abbé Pierre's brush with death as a result of his boat sinking, and it would highlight the groups in the region and their work.

The last WA in Jesolo (Italy) decided to arrange a forum of alternatives, international work camps, publish a global report, etc., which has been done. As for the forthcoming assembly, several preparatory sessions have taken place, particularly focusing on two topics: self-sufficiency and solidarity, and belonging to the movement.

Topics that do not require too much discussion will be addressed online, while discussions about the future and the movement's policy directions will take place in Uruguay. Groups can now register and need to do so quickly by 5 November: information, documents and the programme can be found on assemblee-mondiale-emmaus.org.

Global report

The first Emmaus global report on its fight against poverty will be published on 17 October 2021, with the aim of demonstrating that poverty is not an inevitability. The publication date coincides with the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Resources are available to bring to life the report in the different countries, each Emmaus group can make use of the communications kit which has been sent out in order to publicize the report to local and national media outlets.

It should be noted that the report is quite long, maybe too lengthy for all the members of all the groups to get to grips with it: the short resources to be published every day for six weeks could better meet this need. Language could also be a barrier for some groups and members: if some groups are interested in specific resources, we could try to arrange a few translations into other languages.

Financial self-sufficiency and the future of our income-generating activities

There are several reasons for the debate on financial self-sufficiency. Firstly, it is one of the fundamentals of the movement, and the issue is being raised as part of the preparations for the 2021-2022 world assembly, and when we discuss the issue, we are realising that the different countries and groups do not have the same vision or definition of the principle. Secondly, Emmaus' traditional income-generating activity is now experiencing difficulties, particularly due to an increase in competition, the drop in quality, and even the new EU regulations. How is each group experiencing the issue, and what are the prospects for our income-generating activities?

The obligation to collect waste separately in the EU, for instance, could be an opportunity for Emmaus, but it is also likely to make the sector more professional, and make the work done for decades by the movement increasingly technical and controlled.

Some groups are developing new activities to adapt to the situation, such as working with wood, furniture building and repair, catering (in Poland). The overly large amounts of textiles collected remain a real problem, and groups are also running campaigns to reduce new clothing consumption (in Finland). In Robert's groups in Sweden, unsold clothing from the Emmaus stores is often sold to the company Vive in Poland (which sorts the clothing for the international market

and recycles). A European exchange of practices was arranged on the subject of the textiles overdose in November 2020 and needs to be continued.

Regarding the principle of self-sufficiency, it was reiterated that the central idea of Emmaus is that people in difficulty get together and support themselves through their own efforts. The implementation of an economic model should not be to the detriment of support for companions. To facilitate this support or improve the quality of their provision, several groups are applying for public national and EU funding (in Montauban in France and in Poland, see the group news below). For everyone, the key issue is retaining political independence.

As for Emmaus Europe, the organisation is continuing to monitor developments to the legislation with RREUSE. If some countries need help to negotiate or are observing changes, they must feel free to contact EE for support or to pool information. Furthermore, a European working group is starting to consider a campaign to raise charity shop customer awareness about the environmental and social impact of fast fashion, the special nature of donations at Emmaus, the importance of donating good-quality items, and the need to buy less, particularly new clothing. This could be coordinated with an initiative aimed at the EU about the European textile strategy, which is currently being developed.

Migration

The situation for migrants in the region is very difficult, notably because of Alexander Loukachenko in Belarus, who, having seen neighbouring countries welcoming political opponents who were fleeing his repressive regime, has sent migrants from the Middle East and Africa to these countries. The Polish government has declared a state of emergency on the Belarus-Poland border, and is preventing anyone from observing and witnessing the action that it is taking. It seems that the border guards are brutally returning migrants who try to cross the border, while confiscating their personal belongings. A large swathe of the Polish population agrees with these practices, which is exacerbated by the propaganda and manipulation operations on the main TV channels, which are state-controlled. The same sort of reaction can be seen in Latvia, while in Lithuania, the group has taken steps for more respectful provision for migrants, and is providing information about the risk of human trafficking to which child migrants could fall prey.

This period is highlighting the inconsistencies of our governments, as they state that they are only combating economic migration, yet they do not take in political refugees. Moreover, this is the responsibility of the entire EU, as the border guards also belong to the Frontex border agency, and Europe is putting pressure on the Schengen Area entry point countries in the region and in the Balkans, so that they allow a minimum number of migrants to enter. The groups in the Poland-Ukraine Collective are shocked by political developments in their countries and want to act.

Public opinion is also changing across the EU, and there is undoubtedly a challenge for us with regard to raising the awareness of the general public who come to our shops by sharing our experiences.

Group news

Poland		
Emmaus Brat Albert	Emmaus Lublin	Emmaus Rzeszów
<p><u>Nowy Sącz</u>: There are currently 20 companions and 70 people (including six women and soon a child) in the shelter. In 2020, the first shop was closed from late March to early May, and the second shop, located in a tourist area, was only able to reopen in July. The group had to cut its workforce, despite government support covering roughly 30-40% of wages. A fundraising initiative by a friend in the US managed to raise €7K. During lockdown, the group focused its efforts on its woodworking workshop, and thanks to the lovely furniture sent by Emmaus Annemasse, sales on reopening have been good. Overall, roughly 70% of income comes from sales, and 30% from furniture restoration (this service is offered to customers). A new law has forced the group to expand the homeless shelter to the detriment of the community areas. A section of the shop has therefore had to be closed down to create bedrooms for the companions. Another law has forced the group to switch its heating system to mains gas. This represents a small saving for Krakow, which had been using liquid gas for heating, but a big increase for Nowy Sącz, whose heating system was previously wood-fired.</p> <p><u>Krakow</u>: There are currently 12 companions, who work in the shop, but also in the woodworking workshop and a small vegetable garden. The shop had to shut for a week. One of the two employees had to be made redundant and replaced by a companion.</p> <p><u>Solidarity</u> Thanks to the European solidarity programme, the group has been able to get a new truck. Overall, roughly 60-70% of the goods sold are collected locally (with a drop due to the pandemic). However, the quality is less good, and last year the group had to pay €1,500 for landfill. Consequently, container loads are still very important, and the rhythm of one every two months is sufficient.</p>	<p>There are currently 32 companions in four community houses. The shop and pizzeria were closed for several weeks, but business is now back to normal. During lockdown, the group got involved in helping poor and elderly people in Lublin. Soup was made every day to help a group of soldiers who were distributing food, and a bus was loaned to them. Thanks to EU support, the group has just finished renovating one of the buildings, and this has significantly improved living conditions; almost all the bedrooms are now single rather than shared rooms. The group has also purchased the building in which the pizzeria is housed for roughly €160K, thanks to an almost interest-free loan. The group is building a new shop thanks to EI's support. Following legal complications, a big fine was fortunately cancelled. The building work is almost finished, and there are just a few inside jobs to be completed. The total cost is €200K (without counting the work done by the companions), of which €73K is from EI, €30K is from Emmaus Jura, €35K is own funds and other sources of support. The work should be completed by the end of the year and the inauguration is scheduled for 2022. This could be an opportunity to promote Emmaus Lublin and organise an international solidarity sale. Collections are quite good, the telephone rings all day, and the two trucks are constantly out and about on collections.</p>	<p>The group was founded 15 years ago and has two sites, one in the centre and the other in the suburbs. There are currently 16 companions and five paid employees. The group is continuing its efforts to straighten out its situation, with the help of Pierre Dubois in particular. The group has finished paying back Emmaus Cologne, and is now starting to pay back Emmaus Annemasse. The shop was closed for six weeks in 2020. The situation was difficult, but everything went well in the end thanks to the support of the other communities and the container loads received.</p>

Ukraine	
Emmaus Oselya	Nasha Khata
<p><i>The group was unable to attend because of travel restrictions, but extended a warm greeting. They might find it easier to travel if the collective was held over the summer (May-September).</i></p> <p><i>As for the situation in Ukraine, the east of the country is still in a state of war, and inflation is so high that some schools can no longer pay their gas bills and are going to have to close.</i></p>	<p>The numbers of needy people in Drohobych are increasing. The group has two buildings that can house 70 people, and 65 places are filled. It also has two shops, and a house for housing families and offering a better environment to children in education.</p> <p>The group is slowly progressing with renovation work on the second building (loaned for 25 years), even though it does not yet have all the required funding. In total, the repairs are estimated to cost €250K (including the work already done). The community has been living in the building for a year, but the heating system is faulty, and the water froze over winter. The group hopes to obtain support from the local council.</p> <p>A large number of inspections are taking place and the group is awaiting payment of funds by the Fondation Abbé Pierre so that it can complete its fire safety work.</p>

Latvia		Lithuania
Amis 3	Emmaus Smiltene	MPFSC
<p><i>Jean was unable to attend but made a big contribution to the meeting. We thank him for his help.</i></p> <p>The group has had a large shop for three years. The volunteer dynamic is good, and the shop opens on Wednesdays and Saturdays, while for the rest of the week it is used to prepare items for sale and to repair furniture. The shop was closed for three months during lockdown: the group took advantage of the closure to renovate it and rent a warehouse (€100 a year for over 1,500m²). The group is currently considering whether to purchase the warehouse.</p> <p>The group is continuing to try to increase local collections (around 15%) but the economic situation is difficult. The container loads are very important and the following items sell well: domestic appliances, kitchenware, chests of drawers, beds, rugs, pillows, blankets...</p>	<p>The group has been operating for 22 years and has a small building connected to a hospital. The rent is paid by the local council in exchange for housing four homeless people in the winter months. This funding covers the rent but does not fully cover the service charges. Arija is the only non-disabled person. The shop is supplied by the containers: the group can receive one a year, without textiles. The shop remained open during the pandemic, but had hardly any customers.</p> <p>The annual school supplies handout to children at Christmas was heavily disrupted. A truck should be sent by Fredriksdal in November for this event. NB: The group has already received loads of quite poor-quality goods.</p>	<p>The MPFSC was set up 25 years ago, at a time when Lithuania was a major transit country for human trafficking. The group has numerous focus areas, particularly support for human trafficking victims, combating gender-based violence, and helping the families of missing children.</p> <p>The centre currently houses around 30 people per year, including children, and has an Emmaus shop in which the residents can volunteer and chat to customers. Moreover, social workers, psychologists, lawyers etc are involved, as well as many volunteers.</p> <p>The centre took action in response to the rise in the number of refugees from Belarus: these refugees no longer live in camps and the children are attending school.</p>

Thank you once again to Amis 3 for hosting and arranging the meeting, and to the participants for the worthwhile discussions!