

GIVING A VOICE TO CITIZENS

Building stakeholder engagement for effective decision-making

Guidelines for Decision-Makers at EU and national levels



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INTRODUCTION

Today the credibility of the EU and the fight against poverty are facing a serious crisis: the EU and the member states are not at all delivering on the poverty target of the Europe 2020 Strategy (lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty), on the contrary, over 8 million more people find themselves in a situation of risk of poverty!¹ An effective implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy and anti-poverty policy is therefore necessary and urgent.

“ While there are some signs of economic recovery, Europe’s social crisis continues. Some Member States are still facing a social emergency and inequalities within and between Member States are growing. Due to the long Eurozone crisis, we have not managed to get closer to our Europe 2020 objective of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and/or social exclusion. Quite the contrary, the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU (comprising people at risk of financial poverty, experiencing material deprivation or living in jobless households) increased from 114 million in 2009 to 124 million in 2012. This makes it more urgent than ever to find and implement real solutions to the monetary problems of the EU. Member States need to concentrate more efforts and resources on job-creation and the fight against poverty. However, a real difference can only be made if the policies, their design, and implementation are made in close cooperation with social service providers, civil society and people experiencing poverty. The ongoing review of the Europe 2020 Strategy provides us with a new opportunity to draw lessons from the crisis years and outline the necessary actions at European, national and local level.

László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion.

EAPN believes that developing effective anti-poverty policies largely depends upon asking the right questions and finding the right answers. This means putting into practice an effective participative process which can harness the expertise and know-how of all key actors.²

¹ Eurostat.

² This handbook addresses the development of consensus-based effective stakeholder dialogue. Of course, EAPN also uses other ways to engage, other forms of effective stakeholder participation such as: campaigns, direct action, modelling alternatives, civil disobedience, etc. which are outside the scope of this publication.

The opinions and solutions coming directly from people with direct experience of poverty are therefore key. Regular dialogue and engagement with civil society however is not only crucial for achieving positive policy solutions, but is essential for providing accountability and legitimacy to government's policies.

The EU initially took some steps in the right direction of promoting such participative civil engagement, through the Social OMC, particularly in the National Action Plans for Inclusion. The new playing field of Europe 2020 with the National Reform Programmes, and the European Platform Against Poverty seemed to offer positive opportunities for good engagement, however it is widely acknowledged to be delivering this engagement weakly³.

Whilst the Common Principles on Stakeholder engagement were promised in the European Platform Against Poverty,⁴ little progress has been forthcoming.

To help change this situation, EAPN (the European Anti-Poverty Network) drafted this handbook, offering guidelines for effective stakeholder engagement. The handbook aims to contribute to this important objective by providing common principles, concrete tools and tips to help policy makers take the important step of putting effective stakeholder dialogue into practice, drawing on concrete inspiring practice – at the EU, national and sub-national levels.

We are explicitly referring to the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy and specifically the poverty target, developed through its instruments (National Reform Programmes, National Social Reports, the Country-Specific Recommendations, the European Platform Against Poverty, The European Convention, National Platforms against Poverty and Social Exclusion, ...).

Nevertheless, we have the ambition with this booklet to offer tools that reach further than only stakeholder engagement in the field of social policies and policies with a direct visible link with the fight against poverty. Other (macroeconomic) policies can also have a major impact on the fight against poverty, which means that also in these fields, stakeholder engagement in general and the involvement of people with direct experience of poverty and the NGO's working with and for them⁵ is both useful and necessary.

We hope this booklet will inspire decision-makers at all levels to take the next step to drive forward genuine and effective stakeholder dialogue with the people who bear the brunt of the policies.

³ Including according to EAPN's own assessments e.g. *Widening the Gap*, EAPN 2013 Assessment of the NRPs, <http://www.eapn.eu/en/news-and-publications/publications/eapn-position-papers-and-reports/eapn-publishes-widening-the-gap-2013-marked-the-3rd-round-of-national-reform-programmes-since-the-launch-of-europe-2020-in-2010-eapn-has-engaged-in-this-process-every-year>.

⁴ The original Europe 2020 Strategy Communication of the European Commission underlined the importance of a partnership approach:

"This partnership approach should extend to EU committees, to national parliaments and national, local and regional authorities, to social partners and to stakeholders and civil society so that everyone is involved in delivering on the vision."

"The success of the new strategy will therefore depend critically on the European Union's institutions, Member States and regions explaining clearly why reforms are necessary – and inevitable to maintain our quality of life and secure our social models –, where Europe and its Member States want to be by 2020, and what contribution they are looking for from citizens, businesses and their representative organisations" (EAPN Toolkit on Engaging in the National Reform Programmes).

⁵ 'Non-Governmental Organisations working with or for them': Sometimes these organisations involve self-organized groups, sometimes it concerns Civil Society Organisations defending the rights of people with direct experience of poverty, and working together with them.

WHAT?

In this first chapter, we have a closer look at what we mean by 'meaningful stakeholder dialogue and stakeholder engagement'. This means clarifying first the concepts of 'stakeholders', 'dialogue', and 'engagement', as well as providing some core principles. These core principles arise out of the work to engage people experiencing poverty and anti-poverty NGOs in the development of anti-poverty strategies at the national and EU level.

CLARIFYING CONCEPTS



Stakeholders are interested parties or groups, key actors, especially those organisations and individuals who are impacted by certain policies.



Stakeholder Dialogue could be described as a facilitated process where Governments sustain dialogue with those organisations that are seen to have a stake in its activities and which contribute towards its objectives. This can be as a one-off exercise or part of a long-term, structured process. It is a two-way communication, not just an information exercise.



Stakeholder Engagement describes a broader, more inclusive, continuous process of debate and interaction between government and stakeholder that builds to a regular, structured relationship.

In this booklet, "Meaningful Stakeholder Dialogue and Engagement" assumes the goal of building a regular and useful dialogue between stakeholders and policy makers at the different governance levels, as part of a structured stakeholder engagement process.

Inspiring practice 1: The Belgian Platform against poverty and social exclusion and Europe2020

The Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion EU2020 is a dialogue platform that unites people with direct experience of poverty and the NGOs working with and for them, Social Partners, Public Service, local authorities, private actors, (a representative from) the Secretary of State responsible for the fight against poverty..

During the meetings of the Belgian Platform, different themes are discussed: The Belgian anti-poverty policy, the implementation of the EU2020 strategy in Belgium, the Annual Convention...

The Belgian Anti-Poverty Network organises an intensive process with the people experiencing poverty, in preparation for the meetings of the Belgian Platform.

"The fact that people with direct experience of poverty (and the NGO's) are in a continuous, ongoing dialogue process with the policy makers and officials is very valuable. It's an opportunity for the Belgian Government to be able to consult these experts on relevant matters. Though unfortunately, the platform has no strong formal status, and is not recognised as a consultative body for all relevant policy."

Belgian Anti-Poverty Network, 2013.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Meaningful stakeholder engagement is:

PARTICIPATIVE

- ✓ Direct participation of people with experience of poverty and the NGOs working with and for them, should be an explicit criteria and priority.
- ✓ Time should be taken to embed a positive, participative methodology that can ensure that all stakeholders can participate on an equal basis.

INCLUSIVE

- ✓ The engagement should aim to involve representatives from all groups facing exclusion (diversity in terms of age, gender, background, abilities,..)
- ✓ Recognise that not all partners come with equal power and influence. Any dialogue process must make extra efforts to involve the most vulnerable, and to promote a methodology which ensures their equal participation.

RESPECTFUL

- ✓ There should be **mutual respect** for all actors involved, and recognition of all competencies as interlocutors on an **equal basis**, regardless of their position or influence.
- ✓ Stakeholders, including people with direct experience of poverty, are **independent and equal actors** with their own expertise, vision and political demands, and they should be recognized as such. They can **represent groups** and their input is vital for policy solutions exceeding personal stories and experiences.

CONTINUOUS AND TWO WAY

- ✓ Structured dialogue is more than a one-off consultation or information meeting, it's an ongoing process, which grows in time.
- ✓ The commitment to a long-term dialogue and engagement needs to be made from the outset as a committed two-way relationship.

OPEN

- ✓ Stakeholder involvement can be effective only in an atmosphere of trust and confidence, in which all stakeholders can engage in an open dialogue, also when this means that critical voices are raised.
- ✓ Different (creative / non-traditional) methodologies can be used and can help to breed mutual trust and confidence, from the policy-maker and stakeholder sides.

TRANSPARENT

- ✓ From the start, there should be clarity about the scope of the engagement (its limitations as well as its potential), the decision-making process and the role of stakeholders, as well as full information on the decision-making process.
- ✓ Only if stakeholders are clear about how decisions will be made, their role, responsibilities and functions will it be possible to achieve a constructive relationship and build trust.
- ✓ Stakeholders and associations of people with direct experience of poverty should also confirm their representative status and mechanisms.
- ✓ All relevant documents and drafts should be made accessible to all stakeholders.

- ✓ Stakeholders' views should be collected transparently as an intrinsic part of the evaluation.

ACCOUNTABLE

- ✓ Constructive and timely feedback should be given to stakeholders at every stage – particularly when input has been made, to explain what has been taken on board, what not and why.
- ✓ The views of stakeholders should be collected and included as a separate annex to a policy document (as is the case for the French NRP).

COHERENT

- ✓ The methods and ways of treating stakeholders, particularly people with direct experience of poverty, should be coherent with promoting inclusive, cohesive societies based on human dignity and rights.
- ✓ All levels of policy decision-making (EU, national and sub-national) should agree to common principles for stakeholder engagement, including people with direct experience of poverty, and take responsibility for implementing them, and monitoring the implementation.

EFFECTIVE

- ✓ Effective and meaningful consultation should imply involvement from the drafting or development of a policy response through to its implementation and monitoring.
- ✓ The effectiveness of the consultation should be evaluated in terms of its objectives – on content and process. Successful dialogue means there's an impact and there are visible/tangible results!

MYTH 1: *Stakeholder engagement wastes a lot of time...*

Achieving consensus and a thorough preparation needs time, that's true, but...

- ⇒ For every hour spent in stakeholder dialogue, there's a multiplier effect of additional input for better solutions.
- ⇒ It contributes to effective policies, and as such is not a waste of time but a smart investment!

Conclusion: the time is only wasted if it is not done effectively! saves time!



Inspiring practice 2: EAPN Poland

In 2011, there was no consultation on the NRP, but slowly an institutional structure has been created, including social partners and NGOs. In 2012, little impact was observed in the final text. However, in 2013, 2 NGOs submitted detailed amendments and some were accepted, and feedback given on why the others were not. Since then, partners are able to propose themes: youth employment, cooperation business, education, in-work poverty – based on the CSRs received by Poland. This is how EAPN Poland managed to move from outsiders to having an active role in the inter-ministerial process.

Regarding EAPN's engagement with the anti-poverty programme, there exists an important conditionality in the Structural Funds regulation, to have an anti-poverty strategy. EAPN PL suggested that this be included in the NRP, which was accepted in 2013, and the drafting started in January. EAPN Poland was sent a working draft, and submitted 140 comments to it, but there has been no institutional process of consultation around this, so impact is unclear. (EAPN (2013) Conference Report: What progress on poverty and participation, October 2013).

WHY?

In this chapter we reflect on why meaningful stakeholder engagement should be organised. First of all, we demonstrate its added value; in the second part we highlight how the EU recognizes the necessity of stakeholder engagement for good policy making, and lastly we examine the challenges we are facing today, which make quality stakeholder engagement even more urgent.

ADDED VALUE OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Rights-based Civil Society organisations very often work across sectors, promoting a comprehensive approach to the sustainability of society and the well-being of its people. As administrative bodies are often limited in scope vis-à-vis other authorities, the holistic understanding and information from the ground that civil society brings to decision-making contribute to political responses that fit a strategic approach. This makes stakeholder engagement a mutually beneficial process, a win-win situation, which results in better policy making.

BRINGING IN ESSENTIAL EXPERTISE AND KNOWLEDGE

- ✓ People with direct experience of poverty and their representatives have an expertise that often policy makers don't have; their complementary knowledge that can make policies more effective and efficient. This can be particularly important to understand what works or doesn't work – and why.

EMPOWERING PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

- ✓ One of the strongest roads to inclusion is through participation. Through engagement in the policy making process, people affected by poverty are strongly empowered as individuals, an important step towards social inclusion and active citizenship.
- ✓ Individual empowerment is strengthened by building collective action. Stakeholder processes can play a powerful role in building cohesive communities which participate in the decision-making process, building the ability to engage, and propose collective solutions.

PROMOTING MUTUAL LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

- ✓ Stakeholder engagement is a mutual learning process for people with direct experience of poverty, NGOs and decision makers. Stakeholders can offer relevant knowledge and expertise, crucial for the development of policies that actually respond to real needs.
- ✓ Decision-makers can communicate key information and examples which underpin the decisions they are taking. This can help build better understanding of the context and the constraints.

BUILDING CONSENSUS, ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEGITIMACY

- ✓ Engaging in debate with grass-roots stakeholders can help to forge a consensus about the causes of the problems, the characteristics and the solutions.
- ✓ Being prepared to develop policies together, to acknowledge the difficulties and challenges, creates more trust and makes citizens feel that governments are more accountable to them for the decisions they take. This helps to enhance their legitimacy.

RAISING VISIBILITY AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

- ✓ Getting stakeholders actively involved can be one of the best ways of publicising and giving visibility to EU and national strategies like Europe 2020 – as they can publicise them through their own communication tools, media work and in their advocacy and representation work.
- ✓ As visibility increases – so does public awareness of the issues, the constraints and the solutions.

ENHANCING COORDINATION

- ✓ Bringing together stakeholders from different policy areas and areas of intervention can help to improve horizontal coordination.
- ✓ Involving different levels of governance can increase vertical coordination, i.e. particularly in the lines of decision-making.

By giving a voice to those who are directly affected by policy-making, including in particular people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion, governments, local authorities and agents, public bodies, business and any relevant actors whose decisions impact on people's lives, will benefit from the input and expertise of civil society organisations, helping strengthen the effectiveness of their policy responses and actions they undertake and ensure that the measures adopted will deliver better social inclusion, social protection, labour markets etc.

In times of crisis, amplified by the environmental challenges and demographic ageing, such broad participation of citizens representing different population and age groups and their organisations will help reflect the needs and expectations of our diverse societies more accurately.

“Policies are stronger, more stable and confident in those societies with a high degree of participation and social cohesion. Fighting poverty therefore must be a collective struggle for the exercise of rights of all persons. Those who are responsible for public policy, in particular, must consider the needs and proposals coming from those who are experiencing social exclusion.

Leire Pajín, Former Minister of Health, Social Policy and Equality (Spain, 2010).

EU POLICY FRAMEWORK

Stakeholder dialogue has been recognized strongly by the EU as a necessary component of good policy making at the EU level. This support has been steadily growing with the development of guidance and codes of guidance in key areas⁶. However, subsidiarity arguments are also used to undermine the role of the EU in this field, saying it should be left up to Member States to develop their own processes. Coherent policy making however requires a level playing field and common rules, even if the methods are adapted to national contexts.

Governance principles in the Lisbon Treaty

Civil dialogue is introduced as the **first principle among the governance principles in the Lisbon Treaty** (Article 11). This article seems to recognise that participatory democracy, based on

⁶ E.g. the Code of Conduct on Partnership adopted by the EC in January 2014 specifically promotes civil-society involvement in the design implementation and monitoring of EU Structural and Investment Funds: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/pdf/preparation/da_code%20of%20conduct_en.pdf

stakeholder involvement, can reduce the so-called democratic deficit of the European Union. Article 11 provides a legal basis for civil dialogue – recognising it as distinct from social dialogue – and involves the responsibility of all EU institutions. Following this logic, the active participation of all citizens and their representatives should become a principle of good governance and eventually form a complement to representative democracy. Thus civil dialogue will become one of the major tools in policy and decision-making processes in the EU context.

The EU institutions are required to conduct "an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society". In accordance with Article 11: EU institutions have a joint responsibility to ensure that organised civil society, which embodies the aspirations and interests of EU citizens, is actively involved in the formulation of EU policies and processes. A genuine and long-lasting commitment of all EU institutions to engage in a **permanent and structured dialogue** with organised civil society at European level is therefore essential.

Open Method of Coordination

The principle of civil society's involvement is also underpinned by the *Social Open Method of Coordination*. The *Common Objectives* agreed in 2008 and confirmed in 2010, underlined that the strengthened OMC should redouble the focus on promoting good governance, transparency and stakeholder involvement. In the area of social inclusion, a priority was given to promoting participation in decision-making, ensuring policy coordination between branches and levels of government.

According to the Social Protection Committee's opinion on "Reinvigorating the Social OMC" endorsed by the EPSCO Council on 17 June 2011, it is important to improve the involvement of social partners and NGOs with a view to increasing the ownership and effectiveness of the policies in the context of the Method. Moreover, the opinion requires "*Member States' input to cover policies and measures in the three strands of the Social OMC*" (social inclusion, pensions, and health and long-term care) and "*work to be organised so as to ensure synergies with the Europe 2020 policy cycle and national reporting requirements and as to avoid duplications*".

Europe 2020

The *Europe 2020 Strategy* offers a key opportunity to support civil society in stakeholder dialogue, particularly with regard to the delivery on the poverty target – to reduce poverty by at least 20 million by 2020, and the other key social targets.

According to the agreed *Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines and the Conclusions of the European Council of 24-25 March 2011*⁷, the Europe 2020 Strategy should be developed in close partnership with public authorities at all levels, closely involving national parliaments. It is also stated that **"social partners and representatives of civil society shall also be consulted in the preparation of the NRPs and involved in the follow-up"**. All NRPs should continue reporting on how concerned parties are involved in the process.

European Platform Against Poverty

The European Platform Against Poverty is one of the 7 flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy with a specific task to help EU countries reach the poverty target, through 5 areas of action. Area 4 is explicitly focussed on partnership with civil society in order to support more effective implementation of social policy reforms.

⁷ Conclusions of the European Council, 24-25 March 2011
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/120296.pdf

In the *Communication on the Flagship European Platform against Poverty*⁸ the Commission committed itself to “elaborate voluntary guidelines on stakeholders’ involvement in the definition and the implementation of policy actions and programs to address poverty and exclusion, and will promote their implementation at national, regional and local level” and specifically recognized the “**key role of people with direct experience of poverty**.” *“The participation of people with direct experience of poverty is acknowledged as a paramount objective of inclusion policies, both as a tool for individual empowerment and a governance mechanism”.*

Social Investment Package

In the recent *Social Investment Package*⁹, (SIP) the implementation report on Active Inclusion makes particular reference to the importance of engaging ‘relevant actors more vigorously in the development, implementation, and assessment of policies – including those affected by poverty and social exclusion’.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

A growing number of citizens feel excluded from mainstream politics and societal debates, and that representative democracy fails to address people’s concerns and meet their needs. For example the number of people who vote in national elections is at an all-time low, and at the EU level increasing numbers of people feel little trust. By contrast, civil society has been constantly growing and is today widely represented by self-advocacy structures and other community-based groups. These various civil society representatives constitute a new and fundamental part of democracy and enable citizens to express views about societal issues, how societies are shaped and to influence decision-making processes at all levels. But there are some challenges to overcome...

Lack of MEANINGFUL participation

The Europe 2020 process was meant to engage stakeholders in the design and delivery of National Reform Programmes dedicated to meeting the Europe 2020 targets, including the poverty target. However, there is a large consensus that this isn’t working. EAPN in its 2013 Assessment of the NRPs:

Widening the Gap concluded “*an overall lack of progress towards meaningful participation*” is noted with only 13 national networks managing to have any type of engagement with 7 sending in a submission and another 6 attempting to engage in the process. However 67% felt their submissions were not seriously taken into account. Only 3 characterised it as meaningful, in terms of capacity to have any impact on policy and get feedback. Many characterised the engagement as an ‘information exercise’ and at worst “political theatre”. More worryingly organisations are starting to question the value of engagement. This could jeopardize the accountability and legitimacy of the whole strategy.

The EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion highlights the same lack of quality stakeholder involvement in their assessments of the 2011, 2012, 2013 NRPs for the European Commission.¹⁰ In 2013 for instance “Stakeholder involvement is assessed positively in the case of only five NRPs and two Strategic Social Reports (SSRs). While in most countries there is some degree of stakeholder involvement there is considerable room for improvement.”¹¹

⁸ Communication: European Platform Against Poverty: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion/* COM/2010/0758 final */

⁹ (EC Feb 2013).

¹⁰ Hugh Frazer, discussion paper for the Peer Review on the Belgium anti-poverty platform, Belgium 2014.

¹¹ Frazer and Marlier, 2013.

The same concern was mentioned in the Social Protection Committee Annual Report for 2012.

Scepticism about the EU and Europe 2020

Support for the EU is at an all-time low, as highlighted by the Eurobarometer Surveys. 60% of Europeans in 2013 "tended not to trust the EU", compared to the 32% level of distrust reported in early 2007 before the onset of the 2008/2009 global financial crisis and the ensuing euro zone debt crisis.¹²

It is clear that most people don't know about Europe 2020 today. Where people have been engaged, they have lost trust or see it as irrelevant. National governments also do not always see it as important or relevant. In most countries the strategy is invisible, and the lack of stakeholder engagement merely submerges it more. Decisions need to have the necessary citizens' approval, consultation brings political support, credibility, accountability as well as visibility. It gives the decision-makers a chance to communicate and build consensus about specific policies, as well as to explain their choices.

There's a growing democratic deficit and increasing lack of stakeholder involvement in EU and National decision-making processes today (especially related to the fight against poverty). This makes the fight against poverty ineffective and non-democratic. As the EAPN Assessment of the National Reform Programmes 2013 states: *"The continuing lack of any serious commitment to effective democratic and participative governance in NRP and CSR processes with few signs of meaningful engagement in most countries involving national parliaments and stakeholders raises questions about the accountability and viability of the whole strategy, begging the question: 'Why should citizens continue to support the EU?'"*¹³

EAPN and its members are not the only ones warning of this lack of participative governance. The Commission itself states in the Guidance Note for the NRPs 2014:

*"Involvement and close association of parliaments, social partners and representatives of civil society is essential to ensure ownership and facilitate progress on the implementation of policy recommendations, objectives and targets. Low level of involvement of such actors is one factor behind increasing criticism regarding democratic legitimacy of the European Semester".*¹⁴



Europe & Europe 2020? We don't believe in it anymore! Why? Because it's not delivering on the promises!

P.R. (person with direct experience of poverty, Brussels, 2013)

MYTH 2: Our policies are already effective without all this

- ⇒ There is a huge amount of evidence and research showing poverty increasing despite the set of policies and practice put in place to address the challenges;
- ⇒ In all countries there is room for improvement;
- ⇒ To increase the efficiency of existing policies it is necessary to use the knowledge, experience and expertise of those affected by them.



¹² <http://www.euractiv.com/elections/record-60-europeans-tend-trust-e-news-529566> and http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb79/eb79_first_en.pdf, standard Eurobarometer 2013.

¹³ EAPN Publication 'Widening the Gap. EAPN Assessment of the National Reform Programmes 2013', 2013.

¹⁴ European Commission Guidance Note for the NRPs 2014.

MYTH 3: Stakeholder engagement doesn't bring any immediate benefits

- ⇒ One-off exchanges are rarely very beneficial. Long-term investment in the relationship is necessary to bring the best benefits.
- ⇒ Stakeholders are not just service deliverers, or people experiencing poverty, but voters and drivers of public opinion.
- ⇒ Closing the democratic deficit through engaging citizens more actively in decisions, brings the benefits of greater legitimacy.
- ⇒ Stakeholder involvement can create a culture of cooperation, leads to better knowledge and ownership of policy-making, bringing politics closer to the people and resulting in better policies.



Need for coherence between different policy fields

Today, there is a significant lack of coherence between different policy fields, and a dominance of some policy fields (and policies), particularly macroeconomic over others. This undermines the social policies and objectives: increased cuts in public services and benefits, wage cuts... are also damaging consumption and economic recovery, generating increased poverty¹⁵.

People with direct experience of poverty and their organisations feel the immediate consequences of these policies, and need to be consulted, also on macroeconomic subjects. Stakeholder engagement may prevent that different policy domains are undermining each other or become counterproductive.

“

Here we all speak the same language – we want to prove that we are human beings. My participation in the Consultative Council serves to encourage others to undertake the effort, but we also want to call the attention of decision-makers and to show that we exist and that we are citizens of full right. Many of us, in this space of participation, we feel that we are people that count.

From my participation, I have acquired great knowledge, and have grown as a human being. My motivation is to contribute so that all have a dignified life, a house, a job, an education and access to culture. A message I want to pass on is that all people should think that one day they can also fall in the poverty trap.

Adélia Fernandes, Member of the Local Consultative Council of Sétubal, Portugal and district representative in the national consultative Council of People experiencing Poverty and Social Exclusion.

¹⁵ See also EAPN Publication 'Widening the Gap. EAPN Assessment of the National Reform Programmes 2013', 2013.

Who?

Who should be involved? It's important to get the right people who can bring their experience to the table!

The dialogue process is of course an interactive engagement. Strictly speaking it means an exchange between two sides. This is normally on the one side the government / decision-makers and on the other side the people / groups who wish to influence that decision-making process, people whose interests are at stake.

*In the context of Europe 2020, social policies and specific policies in the fight against poverty, this means that **people with direct experience of poverty and their NGOs** should always be involved. They have the necessary expertise and they wish to contribute.*

Inspiring practice 3: **Third-Sector Platform Spain**

The Third-Sector Platform (PTS) Spain is an important interlocutor for the Spanish Government on social policies. The methodology used is the following: EAPN Spain elaborates a draft document which is sent all the members (the 19 autonomic networks and the 16 national NGOs) in order to take into account all their proposals. For the elaboration of the first draft documents EAPN Spain takes into account the proposals of the people experiencing poverty as well. These proposals come from the participation working group and as well from the annual PEP meetings, where all their proposals are compiled in the meeting reports. Then the EAPN document is edited and sent to the other members of the platform, in order to make a more participative document.

Once finished, the Government meets with the highest third sector representatives, who present the common documents, drafted with the participation of all the NGOs.

POLICY ACTORS

The representatives from the government and policy actors' side, should include:

- 1) **The decision-makers:** People who have power of decision at the different levels – this should include Ministerial Level, and/or heads of units, as appropriate, as well as representatives of national, regional and local level.
- 2) **The technicians/policy advisers:** people who have detailed technical knowledge should take part in this dialogue process.
- 3) **Representatives of public institutions and other legal entities** that perform public services.
- 4) **Civil-dialogue officers:** officers responsible for the process, building positive relationships with civil society and stakeholder engagement across the different policy areas.

It is important that different levels of government, from local authorities, municipalities, to regional administration, and national decision-making bodies all recognise the need to engage with social civil society and develop the adequate frameworks for the purpose.

This paper aims to encourage all public authorities to integrate meaningful consultation processes in its working methods.

The government representatives from different departments should also be included – it is crucial that Employment, Social Protection, Health, Education but also Economic and Financial departments are involved at various times.

“ *I have built up my confidence and self-esteem and am no longer afraid to engage with policy makers. I now feel empowered to challenge issues facing myself and my community and can now stand up and speak in public The EPIC project has given me a voice and allowed me to be heard.*

Participant in the EPIC project, Caroline Mockford/Scotland.

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

It is crucial that the **people directly affected by the policy concerned** are involved - in the question of anti-poverty policy, people with direct experience of poverty. They can be invited through the NGOs working with and for them, and/or through their self-organisations¹⁶.

Furthermore, depending on the subject, other stakeholders should be invited. They share the following characteristics and a balanced representation should be sought between them:

- 1) Representatives from organisations representing the interests of people affected by the policy and engaged in advocacy work: the NGOs that represent people with direct experience of poverty and/or are active in the fight against poverty.
- 2) Social NGOs involved in delivering anti-poverty services.
- 3) Social Partners (Trade Unions and Employers).
- 4) Researchers and Academics.
- 5) Representatives from organisations directly involved in developing/financing practical solutions.
- 6) Informal citizen groups and initiatives.
- 7) Other relevant individuals.

MYTH 4: People experiencing poverty can't participate on an equal level

- ⇒ Both participants and decision-makers have different experiences and different difficulties for engaging effectively in such an exchange, both need capacity building.
- ⇒ The knowledge of experts and practitioners in the field is crucial. The expertise of civil society and people experiencing poverty should be seen as an additional input and insight, and appropriate support given to them to express themselves.
- ⇒ People with direct experience of poverty are the most competent to talk about their own lives. To provide them with the right support we need to listen to them.



“ *If we bring up a generation to whom it is clear that everyone can exercise their rights to participate, then this will be passed on to the next generation.*

Ref: Mária Herczog, Eurochild President at the Eurochild Annual Conference: Building an inclusive Europe – the contribution of children's participation, 15 November 2013

¹⁶ On the EAPN website, you can find the contacts of all EAPN members (national networks and European Organisations): <http://www.eapn.eu/en/who-we-are/our-members>

MYTH 5: It is too difficult to find the right stakeholders, and you don't know whether they are representative!

- ⇒ NGOs take this responsibility, they ensure representativeness.
- ⇒ The work of NGOs is often built on the experience of thousands people experiencing poverty, channelled through the organisations at local, regional national and EU level
- ⇒ People with direct experience of poverty are always by definition representing themselves
- ⇒ When involving other stakeholders (e.g. the business world), this question is not always asked, the same rules should apply to all stakeholders, but consultation can be built on expertise, not always on representativeness.



How?

In this section, we present some concrete steps towards meaningful stakeholder involvement. Each stakeholder involvement process has its own characteristics, demands, timing, etc. These steps are not exclusive, neither complete, but important parts of the process, useful tips and tools to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the stakeholder involvement process. All steps are important and equal. The order in which they are presented, does not necessarily reflect the chronological order in which steps should be taken, a flexible approach is required.

Stakeholder engagement should be an important part of quality decision-making processes, from the design, the implementation, to the evaluation of the policies, involving different actors as all relevant stakeholders, but also national parliaments. The whole policy cycle goes beyond the scope of this document, so we concentrate on how the stakeholder engagement itself should be organised.¹⁷

1/ Define the scope and terms of the dialogue and engagement

- ✓ Assess the state of play of your consultation process as it exists at the moment.
- ✓ Decide what you want to achieve and how, with a timeframe.
- ✓ Make sure you formulate your questions & expectations clearly.
- ✓ Design the consultation process, deciding where consultation will take place at different stages.
- ✓ Give sufficient time for engagement: this means time for preparation for some groups i.e. people with direct experience of poverty.

2/ Engage the right stakeholders

- ✓ Develop a mapping of existing stakeholders and reconsider balance to ensure that people with direct experience of poverty, and their NGOs are fairly represented.
- ✓ Search, contact and invite the relevant stakeholders (NGOs working at EU, national, regional and local level, e.g. National Anti-Poverty Networks...)
- ✓ Discuss the timeframe with the stakeholders.

Inspiring practice 4: The Poverty Alliance, Evidence, Participation, Change Project (EPIC), UK/Scotland: Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum

"One of the key elements of the project was the creation of dialogue spaces: the tackling poverty stakeholder forum. This was made up of about 40 members: one third senior level national and government civil servants, one third voluntary sector (NGOs) and one third people with experience of poverty.

¹⁷ Inspiring practices and handbooks for the whole policy cycle can be found in different sources of the UN: <http://www.unep.ch/etb/publications/IPSD%20manual/UNEP%20IPSD%20final.pdf>, http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/11_200.pdf, <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/HandBook/ME-Handbook.pdf>, <http://www.undp.sk/uploads/IntroductoryNotesaboutProjectCycleManagement.pdf>

The forum meets every 6 months to review progress on the anti-poverty framework in Scotland. The forum is membership based, so meets on a regular basis, creating continuity and accountability. The themes are collectively agreed by members – health inequality, stigma of living in poverty and child poverty. The overall objective is to create a space for ongoing dialogue amongst those who are directly involved in policy making, those working to influence it, and those affected by policy outcomes"

(EAPN 2012: Breaking Barriers, Driving Change – case studies of building participation of people experiencing poverty, p 70-71).

3/ **Establish clear coordination and contact points for stakeholders**

- ✓ Name people within the government as civil society contact points ie someone who is responsible for these processes. These persons do not only organize the formal dialogue meetings, but also visits the NGOs.
- ✓ Having a contact person(s) for the organisation deepens the relationship, and fosters exchange and dialogue throughout the year.
- ✓ These persons are responsible for continuous quality in the engagement including the development of indicators, regular evaluation and reporting.

4/ **Invest in the engagement – allocate resources**

- ✓ Stakeholder involvement means learning processes for all parties involved. It requires intensive preparation, time and human resources investment
- ✓ NGOs need to have the capacity, this means they should be empowered as stakeholders and supported in this task, also financially.
- ✓ The preparation and dialogue are continuous processes, it's an on-going engagement, needing adequate and continuous resources.

Resources are required for:

- ✓ the meeting itself
- ✓ transport
- ✓ accommodation
- ✓ ongoing engagement
- ✓ preparatory meetings
- ✓ additional costs for participants (child care, phone calls, copies,...)
- ✓ other

MYTH 6: Stakeholder engagement costs too much money

It's true that financial support is a necessary condition for a quality process of stakeholder engagement. But...

- ⇒ The main costs of the engagement have to be set against the gains of getting better consensus and policies. Compared to overall budgets, these costs are small in proportion.
- ⇒ When assessing costs, an assessment has to be done of the cost of not-engaging stakeholders – i.e. the negative criticisms and misinformation on policy, and lack of consensus on policy solutions.
- ⇒ It's an investment, not a cost, it results in the empowerment of people and better policies
- ⇒ Concrete knowledge and decent consultation is priceless!



5/ Invite the stakeholders – organise a first meeting

- ✓ Explain the scope, clarify expectations, discuss and adapt the timeframe
- ✓ Get agreement on how to take forward the consultation process together
- ✓ Get to know each other: expertise, needs, expectations...

6/ Invest in effective methodologies

Before

- ✓ Use accessible clear language and make time for learning terminology used in the subject being consulted on.
- ✓ Develop a glossary, hand it out to the participants.
- ✓ Invest in some training and capacity building on basic issues/terms for participants and organizers.
- ✓ Make sure stakeholders receive access to all relevant information on time and give enough time for preparation and internal consultation
- ✓ Set out a clear strategy for civil dialogue – so that people feel that it is worth investing the time and energy in an on-going process, and do not just treat it as a one-off meeting.

During

- ✓ Create an atmosphere of respect, mutual confidence and appreciation.
- ✓ Invest in creative ('non-traditional') methodologies e.g. interactive workshops and speaking in buzz groups are often more effective than traditional methods.
- ✓ It's important to discuss the dialogue process, what are the objectives, what is in the reach of the process, what can be expected in terms of outcome... and communicate this beforehand.
- ✓ Be realistic and honest.
- ✓ Make sure that the most vulnerable participants get the floor, and are not intimidated by the other participants. This can be reached by inviting a sufficient number of people experiencing poverty, or a buddy system can be used. This means careful chairing, allocated time in the agenda to speak etc.
- ✓ Give support for practical activities, practical solutions for special target groups, use age-appropriate materials and approaches for children and young people

Inspiring practice 5: **Methodology: Chatham House Rule**

The **Chatham House Rule** is a system for holding debates on controversial issues, named after the headquarters of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, in the UK also known as Chatham House, where the rule originated in June 1927.

Under these rules, participants are encouraged to speak freely, with the understanding that although minutes will be taken, no record will be taken of who has made specific inputs. In some cases, where it is particularly controversial, it may be agreed that no formal minutes are made. Anyone who comes to the meeting is free to quote the content from the discussion, but is not allowed to say who made any comment. It is designed to increase openness of discussion.

After

- ✓ Give ownership to the people consulted by following through, giving people the feeling that they have impact (consult them on the draft, but also get a view on how it should be circulated, agree another meeting, monitor the process together through different stages...)
- ✓ Give written feedback on the meeting –minutes, but also detailed follow up, feedback on inputs and next meetings – contact point for questions.
- ✓ Share outcomes of consultations and processes with the public
- ✓ Even when some proposals were not taken into account, feedback is still important, (explaining why are certain proposals not accepted) and can guarantee continuing constructive dialogue. Governments should not be afraid of disagreeing, but should show willingness to listen and engage in genuine debate.

7/ Invest in capacity building

- ✓ Organise training for civil servants to enhance their capacity to organise meaningful stakeholder dialogue, involving people with direct experience of poverty.
- ✓ These training sessions should be focused using different (creative and unconventional) methodologies, knowledge of the realities of living in poverty, other examples of successful participatory processes.
- ✓ Invest in continuous capacity building of civil society organisations in the preparation of quality proposals, advocacy and lobbying, that will contribute to the improvement of the process of consultation, dialogue and cooperation.

Inspiring practice 6: REAPN – EAPN Portugal

The National Consultative Council of People experiencing Poverty (NCC) was developed by EAPN Portugal in 2009, and aims to actively involve people that are living in poverty in EAPN's fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The NCC monitors and evaluates relevant national policies, through information, training, research and participative planning. From the 18 local Consultative Councils, a member is chosen as representative of local groups to participate in the National Council of people experiencing poverty, which meets every 3 months.

Some of the key outputs have included: developing awareness-raising instruments, evaluating social policy through participatory assessment, contributing to position papers, participating in the European Meetings of People experiencing Poverty.

8/ Establish or strengthen a legal framework for civil dialogue

- ✓ Make sure the framework creates the conditions for participative initiatives (Statutory / legal framework (laws, strategies, action plans, Code of good practices, financing, etc...))
- ✓ Recognize and acknowledge quality standards for structural civil dialogue.
- ✓ Formalize civil dialogue.
- ✓ Apply and monitor the implementation of these rules.

9/ Promote mutual learning and exchange on methodologies and results with other administrations and at EU level

- ✓ Use existing platforms and opportunities for exchange.
- ✓ Establish knowledge and databases of inspiring practices.
- ✓ Organise face to face exchanges (e.g. peer reviews) within countries and in the EU.
- ✓ Apply and monitor the implementation of the guidelines.

Inspiring practice 7: Child friendly cities (CFC) in Spain

The programme “Child-friendly Cities” is an initiative directed at supporting and rewarding all those local entities that work to accomplish the principles contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, more especially, those relating to real and effective child participation.

Cities in Spain have an opportunity to prepare their applications for certification as a Child-friendly City every two years. The requirements to apply for the recognition includes among others the creation of a children and youth council.

CFC is recognised as an instrument to promote child participation – referred to in the National Plan on Children and Adolescents 2012-2015 issued by the Ministry of Health, Social affairs and Equality.

In the framework of the programme, written guidelines and manuals have been produced for local authorities for including children in the local decision-making process.

An Online Youth Parliament has been set up to promote child participation between members of the local child council: as a place where children can discuss practical issues concerning their life at local level.

Local Childhood and Youth Alliances (ALIA) have been set up to promote equality, social cohesion, and civil dialogue regarding policies relevant for children, based on collaboration between banking entities, businesses, citizens and public entities including municipalities.

10/ Evaluate, adjust and mainstream

- ✓ Make sure there's continual evaluation and learning: get regular evaluation from stakeholders and decision-makers and adapt the process/methodology accordingly.
- ✓ Evaluate the effectiveness of the participatory process and adjust where necessary.
- ✓ Mainstream the whole process of involving people in all decision-making processes.

Inspiring practice 8: **EAPN Sweden**

In 2010, EAPN Sweden began a project together with ABF – the Swedish Adult Liberal Education Organisation empowering people with direct experience of poverty to engage in policy making.

The project, using adult education methods, focused on identifying and training people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to create and guide local groups of peers in a dialogue around the Social Open Method of Coordination (Social OMC) throughout Sweden.

This dialogue took place in 10 Regional Dialogue Conferences, whose messages were brought into a National Dialogue Conference, held around four topics: Exclusion, Housing Policy, Social Rights and Minimum Income/Social Security Systems.

Apart from the positive impact the Dialogue Meetings had on the people involved in the project, it even improved the communication between the two government levels themselves on the policies discussed.

The Swedish Government had committed to live up to the expectations of the Social OMC and act on them by supporting user involvement. EAPN Sweden's experience within the

European network and its knowledge of the Social OMC and of the European agenda helped in its relationship with the Government and also in empowering the users. The Government started to train municipality and regional administration officials and politicians to meet and involve the users in a better way and EAPN Sweden was responsible for organising and empowering users to engage in the dialogue with the different levels of public authorities. (See: <http://www.eapn.eu/images/stories/docs/MAG/mag-136-en.pdf>).

Act!

CREATING THE RIGHT FRAMEWORK AT EU LEVEL

Stakeholder engagement is important and necessary on all levels of decision-making, from local, regional, national to the European policy level. It will be most effective if it's installed on all policy levels and all policy domains. Each of the actors involved in each of these levels bears responsibility. The EU should encourage the member states to organise stakeholder engagement processes.

The EU itself and the European Commission in particular, should play an active role by creating the right conditions, providing guidance and monitoring results:

- ⇒ **Develop Guidelines for Stakeholder Engagement in Europe 2020** which were originally proposed in the Commission Communication on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion. These guidelines should specifically identify people experiencing poverty and social exclusion as key stakeholders and address key weaknesses in the current process and include how to strengthen the impact of participation on decision-making processes.¹⁸
- ⇒ **Use the Guidelines to develop Standards** for the involvement of stakeholders in the social dimension of Europe 2020 together with the SPC through a working group.
- ⇒ **Redesign the format of The Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.** It needs to be developed through greater stakeholder engagement and linked to existing participative processes such as national platforms against poverty and social exclusion and the Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty. It should be structured so as to facilitate more active debate among stakeholders and inject greater urgency to identifying how to make progress in achieving the targets for reducing poverty and social exclusion.¹⁹
- ⇒ Provide the necessary funding for the establishment of participatory processes related to the Europe 2020 poverty target, making the means of **Structural Funds and EaSI/Progress** accessible for this.
- ⇒ Provide the necessary on-going **financial and political support** for a yearly **European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty to link to the Convention.**
- ⇒ **Develop the 'Knowledge Bank'**, as proposed in the Social Investment Package, with Member States and Eurofound to help share learning. This should include sharing knowledge on stakeholder engagement in the policy process.²⁰
- ⇒ **Organise (face to face) mutual learning exchanges** between Member States and regional authorities, with the involvement of civil society representatives
- ⇒ **Invest in the work of local, regional, national and EU organisations working with and for people with direct experience of poverty.** This will increase the capacity of people to

¹⁸ Comments paper - *European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Peer Review on the Belgian anti-poverty Platform EU2020*, Belgium 2014, Paul Ginnell

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

participate in the development and implementation of decisions that impact on their lives and therefore support better governance and policy making.²¹

- ⇒ **Give clear guidance to Member States** as to what is expected with respect to consultation and participation. Use all relevant policy instruments, e.g. issuing CSRs in this area.
- ⇒ Use the upcoming **Mid-term Review** of the Europe 2020 Strategy as an **excellent opportunity to follow these recommendations** and make the Europe 2020 Strategy shared, supported and effective!

“ *This Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion is unique in its kind bringing together all actors in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The Convention is thus the expression of the fact that poverty and exclusion can only be addressed in a very close partnership between all those involved and concerned. Because I also believe that only an inclusive and participatory approach will help us in defining the right policies for now and the future.*

José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission, Brussels, December 2013.



²¹Ibid.

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The handbook aims to contribute to this important objective by providing common principles, concrete tools and tips to help policy makers take the important step of putting effective stakeholder dialogue into practice, drawing on concrete inspiring practice – at the EU, national and sub-national levels.



The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is the largest European network of national, regional and local networks, involving anti-poverty NGOs and grassroots groups as well as European Organisations, active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. It was established in 1990.

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