Breaking Barriers—Driving Change

case studies of building participation of people experiencing poverty
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Why we are working on participation

In 2009, EAPN published *Small Steps – Big Changes, building participation of people experiencing poverty*. That publication, presented 10 case studies of how organisations throughout the European Union have been building models of direct involvement of people experiencing poverty in policy making, in projects and in running organisations. Trusting that there is not one single or best model to strengthening participation and that in every approach, participation brings added value for the individuals, for organisations, for policy-making and for democracy, this first publication has inspired many organisations to see where they stand on this issue and what approach they would like to develop that would fit their own reality.
Small Steps – Big Changes has been printed twice and widely distributed. Members of EAPN have translated it and used it to promote participation work at national level among their members and partners, as well as towards decision-makers. It has also been referred to in participation-related research. During the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, EAPN members and partners have organised many activities focusing on direct participation of people experiencing poverty, including trying out approaches described in the book. The book has been appreciated as very useful and practical.

Breaking barriers – driving change

With this positive evaluation in mind, we launch this new publication, Breaking Barriers – Driving Change with 15 new case studies from EAPN members outlining new achievements in this work, assessing where we are in the process and presenting inspiring approaches to building participation of people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion.

The case studies address questions that EAPN members have faced when working on strengthening participation of people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion. These questions include: Why involve people with direct experience of poverty in dialogue with policy-makers? What is the role of social professionals, sociologists, political representatives, service providers, project leaders or NGO managers? How is this participation changing EAPN as a network and its members? What is the experience of members who have made direct and bottom-up involvement a priority? What structures are put in place for continuous engagement of people with direct experience? How is direct participation changing the policy-making process? How can participation of people with direct experience of poverty be developed when working with the media or in developing relations with local authorities? What policy outcomes do these case studies reveal?

The contributions follow a similar structure, sharing their perspectives of why the organisations are working on participation; they then introduce the context, a brief description of the approach, what has worked well and what were the lessons learned and the impact on the organisations. All contributions are complemented with testimonies of people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion that have engaged with these approaches.

Focus of the case studies in this publication

EAPN Austria shares the results of its project focusing on poverty in the media, bringing people experiencing poverty together with journalists to change media representation of poverty. It includes the awareness raising actions, tools, training activities and the media award from the grassroots.
EAPN Czech Republic shares the experience of organising the first national meeting of people experiencing poverty, which has evaluated the impact of the National Action Plan for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. In preparing and organising this meeting, the Network was inspired from other EAPN Networks.

EAPN France presents the work carried out within the framework of a European project focusing on using the tools of the EU Social OMC (Open Method of Coordination) at regional and national level and the concluding book of recommendations.

EAPN Ireland revisits the importance of preparation and follow-up for the involvement of people experiencing poverty in the national Social Inclusion Forum that takes place every year in Ireland. It also looks at the evaluation of such involvement and the aspects that need to be improved to ensure that this participation is empowering and has an impact.

EAPN Poland and ATD Poland draw on ATD Fourth World People’s Universities and European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty to organise a first encounter between people living in poverty and policy-makers at local level in Ursynow district of Warsaw. They look at the transformations NGOs and policy-makers go through when opening dialogue and the value base needed to build on such practices.

EAPN Portugal focuses on institutionalizing direct participation within the Network through the newly established National Consultative Council of People Experiencing Poverty. The case study looks in detail at the processes and the evolving roles of the people who are part of the Council as well as the Council’s evolving role within the Network.

EAPN Spain presents two case studies. The first one analyzes participative practices within social organisations in the Basque Country and the changes needed as identified through this analysis. The second case study looks at the involvement of people living in poverty and social exclusion in evaluating the second regional programme for social integration in Castilla – La Mancha.

The EAPN UK member from Scotland – the Poverty Alliance presents the Evidence, Participation, Change (EPIC) project that has been aiming to introduce participative policymaking in Scotland through training, participatory research and participatory forums bringing policy-makers together with people with experience of poverty and community and voluntary groups.

The Derbyshire Unemployed Workers’ Centre, member of EAPN England which is also part of the UK Network, introduces the involvement of people experiencing poverty into running the centres, delivering services and running campaigns together with unemployed persons whose welfare support has been cut.

AGE Platform Europe focuses on the results of the INCLUSage project which has looked at how national governments and policy makers consult with older people experiencing poverty and/or different forms of inclusion and has developed a Guide for Civil Dialogue on Promoting Older People’s Social Inclusion.
ATD Fourth World’s case study looks at the richness of exchanging and merging knowledge of people living in extreme poverty and researchers through the Fourth World People’s Universities.

Eurochild presents two case studies. The first focusing on the efforts of the network to involve children and young people in the End Child Poverty campaign during the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The second one includes Eurochild’s UK member Action for Children’s approach of involving children and young people in staff recruitment and selection policies and how that is changing the organisation.

Eurodiaconia shares its Toolkit on the participation and empowerment of service users, the process of involving members in developing the toolkit, its outcomes and how it is being used.

**An agenda for effective participation**

The first chapter focuses on EAPN’s assessment of where we are in the process of building direct participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and proposes an agenda for effective participation. It begins with EAPN’s vision of participation, exploring the links between participation, inequalities and the state of democracy. It then looks at the practical steps we have made so far involving more people in anti-poverty organisations and building a culture of participative policy-making. Finally, it identifies an agenda for effective participation that would lead to creating more equal and more cohesive societies.

A concluding chapter draws on the common messages from the case studies, the lessons learned and the good practice developed by the contributing organisations, on the one hand and drawing attention to areas that need to be improved, on the other hand. These include commitment at the highest level, giving meaning to participation and avoiding disappointment, emphasis on process and follow up, collective empowerment – valuing link between experience and policy-making, reaching out to new groups and focusing on different forms of poverty, building alliances with the media and developing new tools.

We hope that this publication will bring new energy and inspire new changes across the board, helping all actors to make new steps to building more participative organisations, policies and a more democratic society across Europe.

Enjoy the read,

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Why we are working on participation

Participation is meaningful only if it enforces participatory democracy and provides effective influence on the elaboration of public policies.

Maria Jeliazkova, EAPN Bulgaria, General Assembly EAPN 2011
Participatory Democracy in Defence of Public Good – an EAPN Vision of Participation

EAPN members are well aware that participation is a complex issue. As was articulated by Maria Jeliazkova at the 2011 General Assembly of EAPN, “The social world is so complex that participation could be in many different forms and types. People could participate including in the destroying of the social world.” Aware of the complexities involved, EAPN promotes forms of participation that enforce participatory democracy and ensure that citizens effectively influence the elaboration of public policies towards public good. This means participation in the political process of decision making in reference to the accumulation and distribution of public resources as well as in the control of the implementation of the decisions, including local, national and EU public budget. EAPN seeks to walk the talk by strengthening the participation of people living in poverty in the way the Network acts and develops.

The current forms of representative democracy do not provide sufficient citizen control and influence on the political process of decision making. Growing inequalities and polarization has concentrated decision making power in fewer hands and has lead to a loss of democracy, which is reflected in growing levels of poverty and social exclusion, in pressure on living standards, in growing tensions and conflicts, as well as in the rise of narrow forms of nationalism and growing levels of racism. This loss of democracy is a key contributing factor to the economic, social and political crisis which is so dominant in our current reality. For EAPN meaningful participation, including the participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, through the revival of old forms and the development of new practices in participatory democracy, is a vital component of the way out of the crisis.

We need to learn the lessons of our history, see how participation through trade union membership and active engagement in associations and in political parties created the necessary civil participation to influence direct and ongoing decisions related to income distribution and the creation of generous, rights-based legal regulation which formed the basis of our Welfare States. We need a revival of this type of participation, consciously aimed at ensuring a more sustainable and equitable use of the resources available to secure everyone access to a good life. We need to look beyond traditions developed in Europe and learn and implement new practices in participatory democracy empowering citizens and strengthening good governance such as participatory budgeting that can contribute to policies at the service of people through sustainable and equitable growth. EAPN’s work on participation is aimed at contributing to the development of such participation practices which can transform the current political priorities and prevent them from generating pressure on human rights, causing enormous damages to the life and health of the people and the planet.

In presenting this vision of participation, EAPN is well aware that despite the evident need for an increase in participatory democracy and despite the fashion to speak in key policy documents of the importance of civil society engagement, in many EU countries support for this type of transformative participation is absent or on the decline. This has led to a growing sense of loss of democratic control over key decisions that impact on the lives of all people.

At all levels in our public systems, there are competing objectives between economic and social goals. Alongside austerity measures, which impact hardest on those living in poverty, there are other public policy objectives aimed at generating meaningful participation and a greater distribution of resources. EAPN will continue to engage with that part of our public systems which aims at supporting meaningful participation and upholding of the public good, while at the same time contributing to a public discourse and engagement which could lead to the necessary shift in the priorities for our political systems towards a social, sustainable and democratic development model.

Transforming Organisations and Policy-making — EAPN

Actions on Participation

Since its establishment EAPN has been committed to building strong participation approaches, including the direct participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in anti-poverty organisations and in policy-making. A reflection process involving members of the EAPN Executive Committee, people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion as well as those responsible for building participation in National Networks, carried out in 2009-2010, has helped EAPN identify the key future challenges to strengthening participation of people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion in the work of EAPN. The resulting participation strategy: *Sharing the Power – Increasing the Ownership, Strategy for building a More Participative EAPN* identifies where we are now and what objectives we undertake for the future.

In the framework of this strategy, EAPN has sought to create spaces for reality check, where people experiencing poverty and social exclusion can reflect together on their experience and give their assessment of how policies are addressing their needs. The work of EAPN in supporting and seeking, since 2000, follow up from the yearly European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty and Social Exclusion, in the Social Open Method of Coordination (Social OMC), is the most visible reflection of this approach. These EU meetings are hosted by the EU spring Presidency country and supported by the European Commission. As part of this follow up, EAPN has sought to ensure that delegates from the European meetings actively participate in other key EU conferences such as the annual Round Table on social inclusion which has now become the Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty, under the Europe 2020 Strategy. EAPN has also sought to implement this approach in organising its own events, as demonstrated by the active engagement of people experiencing poverty in our 2010 events and the thematic Conference on the need for ‘Adequate Minimum Income Schemes’.

People with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion have always played an active role in the development and policy work of EAPN. Our participation strategy seeks to deepen and strengthen this practice. In 2011, EAPN organised the first training for people with direct experience of poverty active at national level and willing to engage with the EU policy-making agenda. Along with this training, the participants took part in the EAPN conference on the impact of the crisis *Getting Out of the Crisis Together – Alternative Approaches for an Inclusive Recovery* together with other members and partners of EAPN. We wanted with this training to strengthen the pool of activists within the membership of EAPN and give a European expression to the multitude of local, regional and national approaches to strengthening participation that members of EAPN have developed over the years. The case studies in this publication give some ideas of the depth and range of these approaches.

EAPN’s internal reflection, in the last two years, has looked primarily at participation of people experiencing poverty in anti-poverty organisations and networks in membership of EAPN. These internal reflections have highlighted cultural, political and resource challenges that anti-poverty organisations face in building participation. While in some contexts participation is a given, in many countries, EAPN members have to convince their own members of the benefits of involving more people experiencing poverty. Lack of funding and resources to invest in building participation mechanisms is a constant problem that organisations face. The crisis has had a strong impact on budgets and priorities. Many local and national organisations have been pushed away from advocacy and participation work and into frontline service delivery, in order to respond to pressing needs and secure funding. This, unfortunately, undermines the achievements on participation as an empowerment tool. Nevertheless, EAPN members have been resilient and have continued to pilot new approaches and empower more people with direct experience of poverty to actively engage in organisations.

As well as this internal work on participation EAPN has been a bold advocate of direct participation of people experiencing poverty in developing, implementing and evaluating the European Union poverty reduction policies. People with direct experience, coming from member organisations of EAPN, are actively shaping EAPN’s strategies and policy proposals, running campaigns and speaking in conferences. EAPN lobbied from the beginning of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, to ensure a commitment to the participation of people experiencing poverty in the EU Social Inclusion strategy, particularly in the National Action Plans. Currently the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Social OMC) has a specific objective focused on the mobilisation of all actors, including people experiencing poverty. EAPN intends to build on these commitments in the *Europe 2020 Strategy* and in the *EU Flagship Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion* to promote citizen engagement, including defending the Social OMC objectives, in this regard. In particular EAPN hopes that the acknowledgement in the European Commission Communication on the Platform can form the basis for strengthened EU support for participation processes.

The participation of people experiencing poverty is acknowledged as a paramount objective of inclusion policies, both as a tool for individual empowerment and a governance mechanism.4

EAPN has also recognised the important role of media in relation to the fight against poverty and social exclusion. During the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, anti-poverty organisations held public actions and mobilized many people, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, in debates on the kind of Europe we can trust.5 Many organisations have managed to engage reporters in a dialogue on what is poverty-sensitive reporting, how to address the stigmatizing and other negative features of media reflection on poverty. Video spots have helped raise awareness on the realities of the struggles and achievements of people experiencing poverty, breaking down stereotypes. EAPN and many organisations have also set long-term objectives of working with the media to communicate positively on poverty and social exclusion, together with the people who experience it.

In line with the broad vision for participation that EAPN has outlined above, EAPN has sought, during this period, to build alliances with social movements, Trade Unions, Social, Environmental, Development and Human Rights NGOs to gather a critical mass in support of a more social and sustainable development model. We have also sought to promote and develop participation in key new areas such as developing participative Reference or Standard Budgets.6 We are also developing links with ActionAid7 to develop knowledge and promote practice in relation to participatory budgeting, engaging people in the analysis of public budgets at local, regional and national level.

The commitment of EAPN members, as evident in the case studies in this publication, demonstrates that EAPN is determined to practice what it preaches in relation to participation. It also inspires us to continue on this path and to push for ever increasing participation process that will be capable to positively influence the elaboration of public policies.

5. For more information about the actions organised during the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, please visit www.endpoverty.eu
6. For more information on Reference and Standard Budgets, please visit www.referencebudgets.eu
7. For more information about the work of ActionAid, please visit www.actionaid.org/eu
An EAPN Agenda on Participation - Key Recommendations

The key challenges for our participation agenda in the coming period will be to:

* Build strong participative anti-poverty organisations
* Build a culture of participative policy making at all levels
* Build a societal consensus on the importance of creating more equal societies

Build strong participative anti-poverty organisations

To be credible in our call for greater participation, including the participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, we need to work on the objectives we have assumed. We need to remain committed to building strong anti-poverty organisations that foster participation and that seek to address the barriers that prevent people experiencing poverty and social exclusion from making their individual and collective contribution.

Empowering more people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion to become activists and represent a collective civil society agenda in dialogue with policy makers and stakeholders at all levels will be the underlying objective on participation of anti-poverty organisations in the coming years. Training, capacity building, highlighting good practice and learning from each other, implementing diversity and non-discrimination policies, eliminating internal barriers and putting in place strategies at all levels will be key components of this work.

If they are committed to democratic principles, public authorities at all levels, must recognise their role to address power imbalances in society and create frameworks and direct resources to foster the organised voice of people experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequality. In addition NGOs must also seek new and diverse ways to secure support, including financial support to sustain their organisations.

Build a culture of participative policy-making at all levels

The case studies provided in this publication and the work that is done by many organisations on building a culture of meaningful participation in policy making must be valued and supported as it provides inspiration to go further with this approach. In developing participation approaches we must define an agenda for valuing and recognising the importance of the participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. We must encourage and develop diverse participation models and approaches at local, national and trans-national levels that effectively reach out to all excluded groups and contribute to positive change, and enable a meaningful contribution in policy making processes. Reinforcing traditional approaches that have worked, including participation in trade unions, NGOs and political parties, as well as engaging with new social movements and acquiring new knowledge and practicing new methods such as participatory budgeting will all contribute to building a participative policy-making culture.
EAPN members are committed to developing this approach and to plan and engage in meaningful participation processes which enable genuine partnership and co-development of policy measures. Public authorities who are committed to real democracy must encourage and create frameworks which facilitate and give the necessary means to make such participation processes work. All those involved must ensure a proper monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the models of participation used to ensure that they produce real results and will not contribute to further frustration and alienation.

In the EU context, the commitments on participation in: the Europe 2020 strategy (including the commitment to reduce poverty), the European Platform against Poverty, and the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion provide a useful framework to foster meaningful participation in policy making. European political leaders have already committed to these strategies and approaches; it is now clearly the time for Member States to show this commitment in practice and the responsibility of the European Commission to support and European Parliament to hold them accountable for these commitments.

The European Commission will produce voluntary guidelines on participation as part of the work programme for the European Platform against Poverty in 2012. These guidelines have been consistently proposed over the last few years, including in the Commission Communication on Reinforcing the Social OMC in 2008, as a result of the limited progress on the objective on participation and mobilisation of all actors. These voluntary guidelines need to be mainstreamed and implemented throughout the Europe 2020 strategy including in the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and national reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. They should be a starting point for a proactive strategy to promote participation at all policy-making levels: establishing clear objectives, indicators for evaluating progress, monitoring the governance mechanisms, process and reporting on participation in the NRPs and Social OMC. They should also be used to promote mutual exchange and knowledge transfer on participation methodologies, results and impact. Adequate EU and national funding to back the engagement for this process will be essential. To do this effectively, the European Commission should establish a working group involving key actors like EAPN with experience in promoting participation to advise on an action plan, and to support effective delivery and follow up at EU and national level. In doing this and in being seen to do this, the European Commission can make an important contribution to fostering democracy.

Build a societal consensus on the importance of creating more equal societies

At the heart of our conviction that we need a society that fosters and takes seriously participation is our belief that it is a necessary step to safeguard our democratic principles. This threat to our democracy comes in part from the unsustainable levels of inequality that we have allowed to develop in our world. Just to take one example, the richest 1% of adults in the world owns more than half of global household wealth.8 Creating more

8. World Institute for Development Economics Research of the UN University, 2006.
equal societies must be at the heart of our 21st century priorities. Fostering participation is essential to the struggle to create more equal societies. The participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is a real test of our abilities to create truly inclusive societies.

Learning to communicate creatively, developing messages together with people experiencing poverty, using different types of media outlets, raising awareness and opening public debates through mainstream and social media channels are crucial to building a participative society and a societal consensus on the need to reduce inequalities.

The experience of preparing and engaging with awareness raising and campaigning around the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion have helped EAPN and its members to develop and strengthen their communication skills. EAPN commits to strengthening the capacity of anti-poverty organisations to better communicate their messages together with people experiencing poverty using traditional and social media outlets. We need champions of the messages that ‘more equal societies are better for everyone’ and that investment in participation processes is essential to build more equal societies. Such champions can come from all walks of life, political, administrative, cultural, social partners, NGOs, individual opinion shapers.

Everyone can play a role. The greater the engagement with participation for positive change, the more people with direct experience of poverty involved and the more benefits for everyone. Reaching out, motivating, empowering, engaging are all steps we can do together. Join us, let’s break the remaining barriers together and be drivers for positive change.

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Why we are working on participation

We strongly believe that a good life for all can only be realized by ensuring the participation of all members of society. Participation thus is a – if not the – key element when it comes to improving democracy and finding ways to tackle poverty, social inequalities and other key challenges of today’s world.
**Brief context**

Media reports and public opinion are often full of stereotypes regarding people experiencing poverty. They are linked to each other and enforce each other in often negative ways with the media reproducing common stereotypes which consequently get even more widespread.

So far people experiencing poverty have hardly been in the position to directly influence or even get heard by media people in Austria. There is a lack of direct communication – other than being interviewed and regarded by journalists as a ‘case study’. Training programmes for media people usually do not include information and consciousness-raising regarding the concrete lives of people experiencing poverty.

**Description of the project**

Based on the situation as described above and with the aim of substantially changing it, the Austrian network started a media project in 2010 which included the following objectives:

- **Raising awareness** for the concrete situation of people experiencing poverty through direct communication with both journalists and the broad public – using the format of small street actions (= Flashmobs).
- **Working for sensitive media reporting on poverty** by organising spaces of encounter between media people and people experiencing poverty, by highlighting ‘Best Practice’ - media reports on poverty and establishing guidelines of ‘sensitive media reports on poverty.’

**Activities**

**Small street actions** (Flashmobs or Smartmobs) were developed and organised with people experiencing poverty, EAPN Austrian network activities and theatre experts. They were meant to raise awareness of both passersby and media. Through the year 2011, smartmobs on poverty and distribution were organised across Austria. Spoons were used as a ‘logo’ of the action. Ordinary tea spoons were brought along and used to make noise to raise the attention of passersby at the start of the short action. Small wooden spoons which had the address of the project website printed on them were given away to people to encourage them to get further information.

Sometimes during the action decision-maker offices, such as the headquarters of the political parties or the prime minister’s office, were called and asked what their contribution towards the eradication of poverty has been and will be in the future.

**A small pocket booklet** on poverty and inequalities in Austria and on how to fight poverty and inequalities was published and distributed. The booklet deals with and gives
short answers to ten of the most common questions around poverty, such as: Does poverty really exist in a country like Austria? Is it not people’s own fault? Is it true that the gap between the rich and the poor grows? What can be done to fight poverty? It also refers to an FAQ section on the network’s website for those who are interested in current data on poverty and inequalities or who want more extensive answers.

Workshops with journalists and photographers

Exchange workshops with journalists and photographers were organised. These workshops were meant to create space for encounter and exchange on equal terms. Both journalists and people experiencing poverty had the opportunity to talk about their daily realities. Journalists from print and audiovisual media had a chance to explain some of the principles of media reporting, including some explanation of why they are always looking for case studies. A special focus at one of the workshops, which usually were attended by 10-20 people experiencing poverty, was given to language issues. Some participants were strongly criticising some of the terminology used by the media, such as calling people living in poverty “sozial schwach” which literally translates into “socially weak people”. During the following discussion they managed to create full understanding by the journalists present that this term was not only stigmatizing but also not correct as a low income does not imply at all that people would lack social skills – on the contrary, people experiencing poverty very often need to develop strong social skills in order to survive. As a consequence, some of the journalists present have banned this term from their vocabulary and their reporting ever since.

Other workshops concentrated on specific media reports, such as a short documentary of two single parent women which was watched and critically discussed with the journalist who made the documentary or on the issue of images as such, when the group of people experiencing poverty were given an introduction to some of the key principles of sensitive photography and metaphorical language by a photographer.

Media-monitoring and establishment of criteria for sensitive media reports on poverty

Throughout the year, media reports on poverty and people living in poverty were monitored by a group of people experiencing poverty. Some of the best and worst examples were discussed at the workshops and were used to develop criteria and guidelines for sensitive media reporting on poverty. Based on this work, a booklet on do’s and don’ts when reporting on poverty will be published.
Journalists Award ‘From the Grassroots’ - for sensitive media reports on poverty

In the course of the media workshops the idea of establishing a journalist award ‘From the Grassroots’ evolved. The award should highlight best-practice examples in sensitive media reporting on poverty which portray people experiencing poverty and their realities in a differentiated non-stigmatizing and non-stereotypical way, presenting them as agents of their own lives and helping to make their voices heard.

A call for applications was launched and journalists were invited to submit articles that were published in print or on-line media or audio-visual media products that had already been broadcasted. A jury of 15 people experiencing poverty involved in the media workshops evaluated the contributions according to the criteria developed throughout the year. The jury meeting was facilitated by the board and staff members of EAPN Austria, the decision on the award winners, however, was made by people experiencing poverty. An award ceremony was organised on 20th of December 2010, and laudations for the award winners were held by members of the jury. A group picture of the awarded journalists and the jury as well as all selected media contributions was published on EAPN Austria’s website. The award got very good media coverage.

What worked well

The project was built on previous work of the Austrian network with regards to media generation and on our work in participation in general. It derived not only from EAPN Austria’s focus on media work but also and most importantly, from the interest of the people experiencing poverty involved in the network’s activities. A small group of ‘core’ project participants could thus be established which proved essential for the continuity and the success of the project.
Based on existing contacts, it was no problem to generate interest among journalists. Quite a few of them know the network and acknowledge its work. Through previous conversation on the issue it was already clear that some of them are particularly interested in further pursuing the challenge of more sensitive media reporting on poverty. This was also reflected in the good number of submissions for the journalists’ award. The award itself certainly was an important highlight of the whole project as it gave visibility of its aims and activities to a broader public. It will also help to secure a certain legacy of the project as the network will award such a prize on an annual basis from now on.

**Challenges of this approach**

Organising the various activities of the project has been demanding with regards to time and financial resources and the project could not have been implemented without the additional resources which were available from the 2010-year funding.

Without these resources it won’t be possible to properly continue the project (with the exception of the media award which will be established as an annual event). It is thus unclear whether it will be possible to publish some printed guidelines for sensitive media reporting on poverty as foreseen in the project and how a more continuous form of media monitoring ‘from the grassroots’ could be guaranteed.

It also demanded a lot of time and commitment from the participating people experiencing poverty and raised a lot of questions regarding their voluntary work in this and other areas. Voluntary work by people experiencing poverty is usually neither visible nor acknowledged by official institutions and public bodies. On the contrary it could even be the case that people get punished for their voluntary activities in so far as they can be regarded as restricting their ‘availability for the labour market’. This is an impor-
tant issue and it needs to be further discussed during the 2011 Year on Volunteering – and beyond.

Regarding the work with the media it would be important to continue and expand it, trying to reach more journalists and also those who are not already well informed and poverty-sensitive and also reaching out to more journalists from non-mainstream media. The journalists’ award would deserve to be organised as a really big event and certainly could attract even more attention, but again this will demand more resources.

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Testimony – a personal experience of participation

“I wrote my first article in 2002, entitled ‘The Train to Nowhere’ when I witnessed a young man commit suicide on a train. I had been living in the street, had nothing but the passport as the only possession, but seeing that situation, I had decided to fight to improve my life situation. I began contributing to the Augustin street paper in Vienna. The name of the paper comes from the Viennese song ‘Oh du lieber Augustin’ about Augustin who jumped into a grave of persons who died from the pest and did not get infected. This is a symbol of survival and one that people living in the street appreciate. My contributions to the Augustin paper are about cultural events which I can attend thanks to the Kulturpass, something very important for us that we fought to have for people living in poverty as well. Kulturpass gives free access to cultural events in Vienna for people living in poverty. I attend events and then I write about them in the newspaper.

Not many people living in poverty and active in the Network have experience with journalism. Since I have been writing myself and am involved in the Austrian EAPN Network, journalists often come to me when they want to write about issues related to poverty. I am a lot in contact with newspaper, radio and TV journalists and I can speak with confidence.
As for the Journalist Award ‘From the Grassroots’, it was so impressive that journalists felt very proud to get a symbolic prize which was a bag with the Armutskonferenz logo. They felt part of the idea and they pass their words and pictures to others. This way, more journalists will reflect on poverty and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion with respect to their dignity.

I feel very passionate about being part of the fight against poverty. I am part of it, I feel like a member of a movement and I don’t know what it gives me but I’m living it and this is great! I’ve had a lot of money and have been homeless without anything. I know both sides of life and in this fight against poverty I feel rich!”

Michael Schutte, Armutskonferenz/EAPN Austria
FIRST CZECH NATIONAL MEETING OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Why we are working on participation

We consider the current level of participation in our country to be insufficient and therefore we would like to increase the participation of people threatened by poverty and social exclusion through the direct formulation of their own needs and experience since this group is greatly underestimated and marginalized.
Brief context

The Czech network of EAPN has been sending participants to the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty regularly since 2004. However we did not succeed in arranging our own National Meeting until 2010. In general the idea of participation of people with the experience of poverty is very marginal in the Czech Republic and both at the national and local level there is hardly any experience of involving this group of people into policy making and decision processes.

Two years ago EAPN Czech Republic and other collaborating organisations joined together to influence the process of creation and thus also the content of the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAPSI). The initiative put a heavy emphasis on the greatest possible participation of the Plan’s target groups, which had previously not been involved. In this respect, the significant source of inspiration for organising this event was the experience of other EAPN National Networks.

Description of the case study

The main aim of the Meeting was to strengthen the participation of target groups in formulating the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPSI) and give them space to reflect their particular needs and influence the social policy of the state and municipalities. Hence, the outputs of the Meeting were incorporated into the background material that has been submitted to the national authority responsible for the creation and implementation of the NAPSI.

The two days event engaged 27 people who represented 9 different target groups of the Czech social inclusion policies, each represented by 2 participants: persons with mental illness,- persons at risk of addiction to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, - victims of crime (domestic violence etc.), - people leaving imprisonment, protective treatment etc., - persons socially excluded and vulnerable due to poverty and ethnicity, - families with children (single-parent or with 3 or more children) in risk of poverty and social exclusion, - homeless people, - young people aged 18 to 26 years at risk of social pathologies, - young adults under 26 years of age leaving state care facilities...

The participants were approached with the voluntary cooperation of 11 non-profit organisations across the Czech Republic, which provide services to these vulnerable groups. The participants were also accompanied by workers from these organisations who facilitated the workshop groups and made a record of the meeting. The participants were paid a symbolic amount of money, partly because most of them were employed and had to take days off work. For the families with children there was also babysitting available.

Predominantly, the participants worked in three workshops (with equal representation of different target groups), discussing topics chosen by themselves. At the very beginning of the group work, each group made a list of answers to the question: “Which areas of my life have been affected by poverty and life on the edge of society?” Then they
voted for the 3 most significant issues that should be discussed further. It meant that the different groups worked on different topics during the whole session. The selected issues (e.g. Housing, Debt, Lack of Dignity) were then elaborated on in 3 2-hour sessions by answering these four main questions:

- How does the difficult situation influence my own life, what was/is the main trouble in this area?
- What has helped me out of that difficult situation? What was available to me? What has proved beneficial, or effective for solving the situation?
- What prevented me from eliminating the problem? What did I perceive as an obstacle?
- What do I propose to establish as a good tool or measure to prevent others from falling into the same situation or to solve effectively this kind of trouble?

All the answers were written up on a flipchart, which made the discussion easier to follow for everybody. The workshop sessions were alternated with more playful activities in which the participants were mixed together so they could get to know everyone – creation of poster/billboard for the public on the topic of living in poverty and social exclusion and shooting video-posters with messages for the policy-makers.

The outputs of each of the workshop groups were presented to the plenary both days. At the end, each of the groups democratically elected one representative for the European meeting.

All the ideas and suggestions were incorporated in a final report which was publicly presented to politicians and the press a month later (together with the poster exhibition and video-poster distribution). The Meeting and its outcome was very useful as material for presentations at ministerial conferences and other events during the European Year 2010. All these presentations were given by the organisers or the participants.
What worked well

* We found that bringing together various groups of people experiencing poverty and letting them choose the topics of the discussion themselves helped to open things out and give them a feeling of being real experts whose opinions and suggestions are seen as very valuable. Moreover, the quality of outputs was really above our expectations!
* The effort made in creating a secure atmosphere really paid off as well as practical things like providing babysitting for the participants with children and opening the sessions to family members.
* Engagement of NGOs that are not members of the Network brought a positive energy and also resulted in further mainstreaming of the idea of participation beyond the Network.
* Thanks to the media attention, the topic of social exclusion was a little more raised in the public debate; moreover people experiencing poverty were portrayed as individuals able to give competent suggestions regarding the system’s changes.

Challenges of this approach

* Although thanks to this initiative the notion of participation was widely mentioned by policy makers and some of them started to express publicly their support of the idea, the outputs have not yet been taken up by the responsible authorities and their support remains only a declaration without any specific impact on the reality.
* As the most important message that the participants sent out was that people experiencing poverty and social exclusion lack society’s respect, it is vital that the next meetings do not become just formal events. Otherwise, we will face the disappointment of participants and perhaps also a loss of confidence in this kind of participatory method.
* It requires a significant amount of time. Regarding the financial cost however it was not as expensive as first thought so there should be no special concern about this aspect.
* The full engagement of all organisations within the network still remains a challenge; nevertheless we found out that we can also address organisations outside the network very effectively.

Lessons learned and impact on the National Network

We have confirmed that participation is possible and regarding the quality of outputs also very effective. Some of the participants are still in touch with us and some of them are very keen on further cooperation and participation in system-changing activities. We will continue to promote this kind of method as an integral part of our system and will try to organise meetings not only on national but also local level to prove that participation of people living in poverty makes sense and is beneficial for the whole society.

Sarka Polova, IQ Roma Servis, Member organisation of EAPN Czech Republic
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Testimony – a personal experience of participation

“When I got an invitation to participate in the National Meeting from the organisation which helped me to overcome my drug addiction I had no idea what it was going to be about. Maybe I was even a bit afraid, but those two days helped me change my life. Meeting people with a similar destiny really helped me. They went through similar problems and they didn’t give up.

My greatest problem is my drug addiction and other troubles which appeared in connection with it in the course of time. However, I wanted to change my life and therefore I participated in the Meeting.

I was really surprised that somebody was actually interested and wanted to know how it feels to live with such a problem and wanted to know my opinion on the possible solution of the situation. It was really encouraging and it helps me on a psychological level. I am glad that my opinions were useful to the people who on other occasions help not only me, but all those in need. I also got some new information.
My topic at the meeting was gambling. You know what’s the worst thing? The majority of the casinos are in the poorest localities of the town. The poor are the easiest victims.

I’m thinking about founding a civic association which would support social housing. It is really weird that there are so many ruined houses in the Czech Republic that nobody cares for. Why do they not let homeless people repair some of them and then live there? The money for reconstruction could possibly be obtained from the European funds. Now I’ll start to deal with the authorities and I’ll see how it goes.”

Erik Nedbal, participant in the first Czech National Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty 2010
Why we are working on participation

The EAPN France network is deeply involved in the participatory approach and takes its cue from the words “say nothing about us without us, do nothing for us without us”.

POLICY ACTION TO TACKLE POVERTY AND EXCLUSION: FROM CONSULTATION TO CONSENSUS

INTRODUCING THE SOCIAL OMC TOOLS AND METHODS AT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

EAPN France
**Brief context**

The project, “Learn the OMC for a Social Europe”, has been developed by the Salvation Army Foundation in the EAPN France network as a multi-partner project following up on a previous European project, “Working across boundaries on social policies against exclusion”. It is part of the French political landscape at a time when the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPSI) is being renewed and the participatory process is earning fledgling recognition from the authorities.

**Description of the case study**

The project was developed in 2009–2010 when working groups from six French regions brought together 350 people experiencing poverty and social care operators (professional and volunteer) with the aim of raising awareness on the importance of evaluating public policies to combat poverty and social exclusion in Europe and in France.

For that, the participants focused on issues in the French NAPSI (housing/accommodation, access to employment, social and professional integration of young people, governance) but also more broadly on the various tools and elements offered by the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), including indicators, peer reviews, the joint report, the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty, the European Round Table on poverty, etc. The idea was to take ownership of these tools, reinterpret them through the experiences of people experiencing poverty, and make proposals for improved public policy action on poverty.

Peer reviews, for example, are a tool used under the OMC to develop discussion between member states and promote the transferability of existing measures between countries. In the project, regional meetings held in Feignies and Montpellier enabled participants to share their thinking and proposals with other people experiencing poverty, social care providers, public authorities and students (300 in Feignies, 150 in Montpellier). The existing working groups were subsequently prolonged in order to broaden the discussions and exchanges of experiences and come up with a common regional or departmental strategy.

Based on this strategy, a set of indicators on good participation practices in public policy evaluation have been developed, a list of all the proposals was made, and a range of tools (videos, postcards, booklets, etc.) were produced to enable participants to put across their thoughts and proposals on anti-poverty policies in different ways. The wide range of outputs gave everyone a voice to speak out on their interests and experiences.

In each case, the method used was to develop these proposals jointly based on every person’s expertise. All the participants (people experiencing poverty and social care providers) have an equal voice – learning one from another is the key to joint development. The groups also allowed for a continuous inflow/outflow of members, given the high turnover among the target groups.
People experiencing poverty were particularly interested in and engaged with the project. So great was the demand for forums to meet, to speak and be heard, that what was started by the project has now been extended in various ways:

* regional groups are carrying on with or without new funding;
* new partnerships have been set up, in particular with the public authorities;
* the consultative council for service users/care receivers, a body funded in 2010 by central government and supported by the Salvation Army Foundation has had its remit extended to 2012 and regularly brings together 80 people to take part in the government-initiated discussions on overhauling temporary accommodation and housing provision.

What worked well

The project has delivered results for all participants:

* for those facing difficulties, it has helped empower them (“we represent no-one but everyone has to say their piece”), be valued (“we take pride in participating and speaking out”), boost their self-confidence (“I discovered resources I didn’t know I had in me!”), recognize their expertise but also change what was often a judgemental attitude towards the authorities and social workers (“I can understand their constraints better”);
* for the social care providers, in-depth work was done on changing practices which among other things strengthened the voluntary sector’s experience working in a participatory approach. This also brought about a shift in perceptions of those supported and their personal development;
* finally, the public partners are also changing their attitudes to people experiencing poverty and opening up their bodies to consultation on the framing and monitoring of public policies;
* EAPN France has also drawn benefit from the project, not least by raising its profile among people experiencing poverty, associations and institutions. The 2009 and 2010 French delegations to the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty were prepared in very close cooperation with the project working groups.
Challenges of the approach

The project also identified certain pitfalls however: the medium-term impact of participation in public policy evaluation by people facing difficulties is not really measurable - investment in the process still comes more from people and less from institutions. Also, follow-up on the proposals is not easy because the bureaucracy hinders real progress with public policies and turnover of the people involved often means starting over from scratch. The resources needed to promote “good participation” are often lacking: those who want to take the thinking forward are often held back by the costs of travel and accommodation, which are a real obstacle to participation in non-funded projects. Finally, people’s time can also be taken up by too many different bodies so there is no real concrete output on social policy evaluation.

Lessons learned

Taking the process forward and trying to address these shortcomings calls for an ever closer partnership between the people directly affected by public policies and decision-making bodies (“Here I am, here I stay”). This partnership can be strengthened through lobbying, projects, meetings initiated by voluntary organisations or public authorities. Whatever else, “Once the door is ajar, you have to put your foot in to stop it from closing”. Any change takes time, “small steps have been taken, but small steps are a big thing”.

Marie Guidicelli, Salvation Army Foundation, member of EAPN France, mguidicelli@armeedusalut.fr
Testimony – a personal experience of participation

“I came to the project partly to try and change things, but mostly so that people would see people experiencing poverty differently, because being vulnerable does not mean being stupid!

The project helped me to know myself, to discover my inner potentials that had never come out. For a long time I had felt unproductive, worthless, and the fact of letting me speak and seeing me first of all as a human being made me want to share my experience and get involved in public policy bodies (the CCPA, the Particip’actif regional group, etc.).

I think the project has helped change the way politicians see us, but especially to see the social force that we represent as something to be reckoned with. The CCPA came out of the OMC: now, the institutions are coming to the members of the CCPA, something that never happened before. It also lets me appreciate the problems professionals face in being unable to do their job because of not having the resources they need.”

Dominique Pion, active member in EAPN France participation initiatives
Why we are working on participation

In a mature democracy – one that values pluralism, diversity and good governance – everyone has the right to participate in helping to generate solutions to poverty and social exclusion. Building solidarity and collective action is at the heart of any effective civil society response, and EAPN Ireland is determined to contribute to a stronger civil society movement at national, European and International levels. Participation of people experiencing poverty is at the core of an effective civil society response.
The national Social Inclusion Forum is an annual event which aims to bring together policymakers with people experiencing poverty and their organisations to discuss national anti-poverty and social inclusion plans. The Forum is a Governmental event and a report goes to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, which is chaired by the Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister). In 2007 the Forum was the subject of an EU social inclusion Peer Review as an example of good practice of participation.\(^\text{11}\)

The Social Inclusion Forum is organised in Dublin and can be attended by up to 300 participants. It is structured around smaller thematic workshops, with plenary sessions at the beginning and end of the day. The plenary sessions usually include a presentation by the Minister, senior officials, and experts, and more recently EAPN Ireland has facilitated an input for a person experiencing poverty during the plenary.

In 2007 EAPN Ireland made a successful proposal for funding to the then Combat Poverty Agency and the Government’s Office for Social Inclusion for a preparatory process to build the capacity of people with a direct experience of poverty and social exclusion to actively participate in the Social Inclusion Forum. While the process has varied it has continued each year up until 2010. EAPN Ireland has worked in this process with partners, including the Community Workers’ Cooperative and the Community Platform.

Prior to the annual Social Inclusion Forum, focus groups and regional seminars were organised. Following these events participants with a direct experience of poverty and social exclusion were invited to attend a preparatory meeting in Dublin on the day before the Social Inclusion Forum. These participants were members of or linked to local or national groups advocating on behalf of their communities and some have been able to engage with this process during two years which strengthened their ongoing engagement. 250–300 participants have been involved annually in the Social Inclusion Forum. In 2009 the Social Inclusion Forum focused on the following themes:

- child poverty – children and their families,
- access to quality work and learning opportunities – people of working age especially young people and migrants,
- older people – access to services,
- people with disabilities – access to services.

Some of these topics were discussed in the 2010 Social Inclusion Forum along with integration of migrants and access to employment for people with disabilities.

All expenses were covered including a contribution towards care costs. For those travelling from outside Dublin accommodation and all meals were provided. Numbers participating have varied between 20 and 30 annually.

The preparatory meetings themselves involved between 30-35 people and have lasted approximately 3 hours, covering the following areas:

- Background to the Social Inclusion Forum including the national social inclusion plans.
- Detailed discussion on the programme of the Social Inclusion Forum for that year, highlighting the main opportunities to contribute.
- Group discussion on the themes of the annual Forum with the opportunity for participants to prioritise for themselves the most important points that they would like to make on the day.

What works well

To date the preparatory meetings have been part of a wider process whereby participants, who are involved with local or national community organisations, also participate in focus groups or regional workshops in the run up to the Social Inclusion Forum. Therefore the meeting is part of a wider process for empowerment of people to have a say in decisions that impact on their lives.

The funding of community organisations and the preparatory process by the Social Inclusion Division is very important and highlights the value that is placed on participation in decision making as part of good governance.

The preparation meetings allow more groups of people with a direct experience of poverty and social exclusion to attend and pass on their messages to those who would attend the Social Inclusion Forum. This has a positive impact on the quality of the discussion and should lead to better outcomes from the Forum in terms of anti-poverty social inclusion policy.

Overall participants are positive about the preparatory meetings for the Social Inclusion Forum. One of the most important aspects for participants is the opportunity to get together with others who have different experiences to prepare for the Social Inclusion Forum. This supports people to network and learn from each other, and develop a shared analysis of problems facing those experiencing poverty. One participant stated that “it helped me to prepare for the meeting and to appreciate the concerns of others”. Another said that the preparation meeting “brought together views from different marginalised groups and made me aware of issues for these groups, issues you would not think about”.

Participants recognised the importance of this collective approach which reflects the work of their own groups whereby group members share their issues and then work together to try to bring about change.

This collective approach builds a camaraderie which is valued and one participant commented that in attending the Social Inclusion Forum, “I had familiar faces that I could sit with, which strengthened me.”
Getting access to information is an important part of the preparation meetings which participants see as ‘arming’ them for the next day. Participants are more aware of the Government’s commitments to addressing poverty and social exclusion and can use this knowledge to support the work of their own organisations.

An essential outcome of the preparatory process is that it supports participants to be able to actively take part in the Social Inclusion Forum. Most participants have been active during the meeting. One participant highlighted that “I also felt that what I had to say was as important as anyone else” and another that “without the meeting the day before people wouldn’t be able to say things, to gather their minds and to speak out”.

**Challenges of this approach**

Despite the positive contribution the preparatory meetings make to the annual Social Inclusion Forum and those who attend some challenges still exist.

Many participants find the structure of the Social Inclusion Forum challenging to engage with. While participants contribute in workshops, contributing in the larger plenary session is intimidating and they find it difficult, therefore their voices can be lost at this level.

Those who attend the preparatory meetings are already participating in local or national organisations and through this involvement have different levels of experience of meetings and events. Most will have participated in some event in the build up to the Social Inclusion Forum. However, the scale of the Social inclusion Forum can still be intimidating.
There is an on-going question from participants and others at the Forum about its impact. One participant stated that despite being involved over a number of years there are “no positive outcomes, no changes”. This issue will have to be addressed in a broader evaluation of the Social Inclusion Forum as highlighted in the 2007 EU Peer Review of the Forum. This is also important in the overall process of monitoring anti-poverty and social inclusion policy.

In the last number of years many community organisations have had their funding reduced or have lost their independence through changes in programme funding. These changes impact directly on the capacity of people with experience of poverty and social exclusion to be able to develop a collective approach to advocating for change. The Social Inclusion Forum and, therefore, the preparatory meetings are part of this wider process and build on the collective work of community organisations at local and national level. For the meetings to be part of a truly participatory process it is essential that local and national community infrastructure is in place and protected.

Lessons learned and impact on the National Network

Opportunities to prepare for large events certainly play an important role in supporting people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to be able to participate. Being able to do this preparation together with people with other experiences adds great value to this process. This is particularly important in preparation for the Social Inclusion Forum which plays a key part in monitoring anti-poverty social inclusion policy in Ireland. It is important therefore that there are clear outcomes from the Social Inclusion Forum and that the impacts of participation are visible for those who take part.

The preparatory meetings for the Social Inclusion Forum are now a key part of the annual activities of EAPN Ireland. Supporting this process has meant EAPN Ireland is involving more people and groups living in poverty in more activities of EAPN Ireland. Many participants from these activities, who have a direct experience of the issues being discussed, have an opportunity to come together at this one point.

Building the capacity of people to bring their experience of working on a specific issue or the concerns of a particular community so that they can address them in a broader policy level is important to the work of EAPN Ireland.

Hearing the concerns and frustration of participants in these and other meetings has stimulated EAPN Ireland to take a more active role in seeking to improve the way participation takes place and how it might inform policy at all levels more effectively. This work on the broader impact of participation has become a key objective of EAPN Ireland’s work and regardless the funding situation, it will remain a key element of our work.

Finally, it has also strengthened the relationship with some state agencies engaging with the Social Inclusion Forum. Through this work EAPN Ireland has been identified as a key partner for the state which has broader implications for our work.

Paul Ginnell, EAPN Ireland
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Testimony – a personal experience of participation

“The preparation meeting was well organised. There was no concern about food, transport or information – everything was looked after and at no point was I worried.

The group was very diverse and I wanted to learn more about other groups such as asylum seekers. It was very informative.

The meeting helped me to prepare for the meeting the next day when there were a lot of strange faces. It taught me how to appreciate what others were saying and that what I was saying was as important as anyone else.

At the Conference the next day I was not too keen to ask questions when everyone was in the main room and I was a bit intimidated by the panel. However, because of meeting the day before there were familiar faces I could sit with and this strengthened me. I did ask questions in the workshop on child poverty.”

Participant in the National Social Inclusion Forum
Testimony – a personal experience of participation

“The meeting was good to bring out the views from different marginalised groups and made me aware of their issues. It brought up things you wouldn’t think about such as on special needs. It gave us a chance to talk to each other and staying overnight meant we could talk together – with like minded people – and get a chance to understand each other. It made life easier for the next day and gave me confidence.

The meetings the day before are really helpful to talk about the Social Inclusion Forum to see how to push issues for asylum seekers, Travellers and so on. It gives us the opportunity to compose ourselves.

It really did help at the Forum. Without the meeting the day before people wouldn’t be able to say things, to gather and say their mind, to speak out on the second day, to fight it with them.

There are no real positive outcomes from the Forum, no change. But I hope something really good will come out of it.”

Participant in the National Social Inclusion Forum
Why we are working on participation

By running participatory projects, EAPN Poland wants to value knowledge and expertise of people with experience of poverty as well as contribute to the nationwide challenge of building active citizenship at every level of Polish democratic society.
Civic participation, building civil society, is behind many initiatives in Poland. And it seems universally accepted when it comes to people experiencing poverty and exclusion participating in the debates relating to them.

However, setting aside the words and looking for the deeds shows up the challenges. This case study describes a few stages in the work done by EAPN Poland. It will partly focus on an event held in the European Year for Combating Poverty and Exclusion that can be a proxy for how far we have come and still have to go.

**Getting started**

Poland joined the EU in 2004. In February that year, ATD Europe and the European Economic and Social Committee called a Fourth World People’s University meeting in Warsaw. It was a memorable encounter which saw people experiencing extreme poverty in Poland and Europe discussing together with figures from Poland’s struggle for democracy: Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronislaw Geremek, various ministers, Andrzej Zoll, the Civil Rights Ombudsman, and others.

It was with this meeting in mind that ATD Poland, as part of the new EAPN Poland Committee, made a tentative start on preparing the Polish delegation for the 7th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty in 2008.

**Towards a dialogue and solidarity meeting with Warsaw City Council**

In April 2009, as part of preparations for the delegation to the 8th meeting, a national meeting was held in the Civil Rights Ombudsman’s offices. Having it hosted by this official agency gave new stature to the preparations. The meeting was attended by two representatives of associations from Warsaw City Council’s “Social Dialogue Commission on support for the very poorest”. And it was from that Commission that the idea of a Warsaw City Council-sponsored dialogue between politicians, social policy stakeholders and people experiencing poverty would emerge.

It was not until 10 months later that the associations in this Commission would make a united commitment by deciding to hold a meeting in Ursynow (Warsaw) borough council offices in May 2010 during the Polish week of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Exclusion. It was to be held on 19 May 2010 and would be prepared with support from ATD and EAPN Poland. Two meetings were held in April and May 2010 to give the members of these associations a few pointers for preparing and supporting speak-out pieces from people experiencing poverty.

With 19 May fast approaching, neither ATD nor the Commission’s other member associations had any real idea how the meeting would go. On the day, many associations...
turned up, each having managed to bring along people experiencing poverty and exclusion. There were nearly 40 of us in the council chambers. The speak-out pieces were prepared and raised fundamental issues. Dialogue happened. The initiative could be deemed a success, a sign of what could be achieved.

The other side of the picture...Challenges to be met

This active engagement in the “participation event” described above requires some comment. The challenges we have identified are discussed below.

1. Keep initiating participation “events”

Many of those involved in the 19 May 2010 meeting spoke of the value and importance of such times for dialogue. Each participation “event” organized reveals expectations and interests by stakeholders in Polish civil society and its third sector. A booklet in Polish published in early 2010 containing excerpts from the EAPN publication “Small steps, big changes” and describing the ATD scheme was very well received. Since the 2004 meeting, staff of the Office of the Civil Rights Ombudsman had also been backing the idea of “participation” and whenever possible called on ATD and EAPN Poland to ensure that people experiencing poverty were present at meetings.

These are reasons to continue carrying on in the hope that eventually beliefs and energies will crystallize around a commitment to a more regular and systematic approach to participation by people experiencing poverty and exclusion. We are still in a development phase at present where symbolic “events” of what yet remains a beginning stage of participation must be kept going.

2. Believe in political dialogue

“We don’t do politics, we build stadiums”. That was the slogan which appeared in Poland in November 2010 alongside a picture of the Prime Minister in the local election campaign, chosen by the ruling party to express its take on a fact of the Polish context: most of the population have no faith in “politics”. It was in this context of deep mistrust that participatory processes had to be developed that included people experiencing social exclusion.

It is a fact that people experiencing exclusion and the humiliation of poverty often need to regain self-confidence and the courage to speak out, to actively participate in a debate. But if everyone including oneself believes that such participation and speaking out is pointless and will achieve nothing, then it is very difficult to engage with it.

What happened, then, on 19 May 2010? A small group of Ursynow borough councillors turned up at the start of the meeting to welcome the associations’ representatives and
play up the initiative. But they did not stay for the debates, leaving their officials to take part in the discussions. “Once again, they’ve left us to ourselves...” said the participants.

Developing participation in Poland requires a real overhaul (or re-construction) of the political dialogue between all citizens and public officeholders.

3. Give support and stay in the background... without having a voice oneself?

The meeting of 19 May 2010 exemplified the associations’ commitment to enable self-expression by people experiencing exclusion. It was the “clients”, “sponsored persons” who exercised their voice. For many of the meeting’s organizers, this was an unexpected positive outcome... Why?

The challenge of participation by people experiencing poverty requires a great ability from association volunteers and staff to be hands-off. They need to enable involvement, support self-expression, and when dialogue takes place, be able to know when to stand back and when to support a voice that is not necessarily theirs. The experience of recent years shows that this is often a “mission impossible”... Or at least that the conditions to make it possible are not yet there.

In many meetings, it was found that before they could enable involvement by people experiencing poverty, the associations’ representatives themselves needed to be able to be involved and have a voice. Even very recently, one of those present challenged us to think again about the point of the Brussels meetings if the associations themselves had no voice.

This is another fact about the Polish context. It is not easy to engage beneficiaries of NGO projects around the issue of participation if those who need to support that participation themselves feel they are not “partners” and feel the frustration of having no voice. Each proposed public platform then becomes a place for self-expression before it is offered up to others. This makes it important also to continue network-building and consulting anti-poverty associations for them to feel that they have a voice that is being heard.
4. Create forums for free expression, leverage knowledge... and undermine ourselves?

Do we in NGOs believe that the most disadvantaged have something to say about tackling poverty? Is it safe to let our organizations’ “users” speak their minds? Does genuine, free participation by people struggling with poverty undermine our own position?

The general context of the fight against poverty in Poland, the scale of the needs, the real limits of public help and social rights mean that “users”, “beneficiaries”, are still highly dependent in their daily life on the help and support they get from associations. This dependence for survival does not create an easy context for encouraging those vulnerable to poverty to speak freely. Will someone really speak their mind knowing that the slightest criticism might jeopardise the support they currently get?

This individual vulnerability is reflected in associations’ activities. The procedures for funding NGOs offer them little or no medium or long term security. Does putting NGOs into enforced competition allow them to choose to undermine their own position by letting themselves be judged on beneficiaries speaking their mind?

This is where the fundamental issues arise. Are we convinced that people who we customarily look at through the prism of “their problems”, “their failings” even “what is wrong with them” to coin the terms commonly used in Poland, really have something vital to add? Do we believe that it may be these people who will help us jointly find new approaches to tackling poverty and exclusion? Do we dare to think that maybe we do not have all the answers; that we also are off-beam?
What enables us really to venture down the road of challenging our own practices as NGOs is the firm belief that to date we have very often cut ourselves off from what people experiencing poverty know and a genuine attempt to build partnerships with them.

These questions that we have come to through this analysis of the Polish context and our small steps toward participation may also arise now or in the future for others in Europe. We in EAPN hope that we will have even more opportunities in the future to discuss them, including with representatives of other countries from the former Eastern bloc.

**Anna Owczarska–Osinska**, ATD volunteer and national coordinator for the preparation of the Polish delegation to the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty since 2008, a.owczarska.osinska@gmail.com, **Peter Klein**, full-time volunteer, coordinator ATD Poland, Vice President of EAPN Poland, pfklein@atd-fourthworld.org

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**Testimony – a personal experience of participation**

“Being at the meeting at City Hall of Ursynów in Warsaw seems to me a sort of mission. I have nothing to lose. I am not going there just to represent myself but to speak for many, as my problems are the same for a whole part of society, such as family affairs, homelessness, cases you cannot solve for years, because there was no access to information on how to deal with it.

These years of meetings and participation are very important for me. They gave me strength and the feeling that I’m not alone, that there are a lot of people like me who also struggle with the same troubles. I’m sure that at a certain point something will change. If we, people who experience poverty, push on officials at national and international meetings, something will change. However, we still need many more years and people involved.

The more we meet with others in Poland and in Europe, the better we choose our path. When we see in one country people tried to act in one way and were successful we may try the same thing. In some other case it can be us that set an example for them. Unless we try and listen to other people experiencing poverty, we won’t succeed. Because the poverty is more and more severe every year, we have to act as a family.”
First of all, we don’t know our rights, so we want to communicate it loudly: those rights should be said clearly and not function only in enclosed circles – not for us. At some meetings we have learned where and what kind of assistance we can receive. Officials, ladies from social services, directors, and people from different associations should be there also to know how it is in reality. Maybe at a certain moment there should be fewer staff people from organizations and more people experiencing poverty, because they have known many situations. Unfortunately, rather negative situations than positive ones.

Another important thing is sharing positive experience. So many people experience poverty in so very different ways, and every situation of poverty is a unique, individual issue. But there is still a sort of connection between these people. Meetings should take place quite often because we make the problems clear. Problems often were not created by us, people in poverty, but by the country laws and systems. Laws are formulated in such a way, that they can be understood only by a very narrow, enclosed group of people.
Personally, I have managed to step out from the hardest poverty and now I can share some advice with others. If we are together: people experiencing poverty and people in solidarity with them, and if we fight together for equal rights for everybody and for the voice for the poorest, we can succeed.”

Maria Sledz, Polish Delegate to European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty
Why we are working on participation

For EAPN Portugal it is essential to promote a strong involvement and participation of people living in poverty, so they can take a leading role in defining the pathways required for the eradication of poverty. The participation of the poorest and excluded in the definition of measures and actions to combat their social and economic situation, and later in its implementation, enforces their rights and gives assurance that their voice is heard and their real interests are safeguarded. More importantly, participation entails the exercise of active citizenship, and through it, citizens express the willingness to change their situation.
Enhancing the participation of people experiencing poverty is for EAPN Portugal a key area of action in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Social integration cannot be attained without consulting those concerned, who in turn expect to be respected, and the conditions for comprehensive social integration to be improved in an atmosphere of equality. In fact, if we want a Europe for citizens we need to promote more participation. This is especially true for those that are excluded but whose contribution is a key element of improving social inclusion.

In Portugal, participation has a history very connected with the European Programmes to Fight Poverty and Social Exclusion, as well as with the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion. There are currently several programmes including The Social Networks Programme, as well as some measures, such as the social minimum income, that consider participation as key for action. However there are still a set of barriers in the development of participative actions, such as the lack of recognition of participation by social professionals; it is not a priority and there are no spaces for the participation of people experiencing poverty; and participation is understood as listening to people instead of involving them in the decision-making process.

Since its creation in 1991, EAPN Portugal has developed activities involving the participation of people experiencing poverty, including the participation in the yearly European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty, in Brussels.

The National Consultative Council of People Experiencing Poverty (NCC) that EAPN Portugal developed since 2009, aims to actively involve people that are living (or lived) 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 of actions that help combat poverty. The work of these citizens also helps the Network gather information on their needs and problems, through direct contact with the difficulties they experience as well as the strategies they use to overcome them. This helps EAPN Portugal identify new strategies and new evaluation instruments of social indicators which are taken up in the lobby work.

To support the National Council’s work, EAPN Portugal has developed the project ‘Ativar a Participação’ through which more people experiencing poverty participate in local working groups that develop their input. The project will also help develop deeper knowledge on these citizens’ reality and will develop their detailed evaluation of the national social policies. This structure counts on the participation of approximately 90 citizens who live or have lived in poverty and/or social exclusion, involved in 18 Local Consultative Councils (LCC).
These working groups are very heterogeneous, representing living testimonies connected to a variety of problems: domestic violence, drug addiction, unemployment, new forms of poverty, disabilities, illnesses, homelessness, etc. The groups are sufficiently balanced in terms of gender or age, most of them with low school qualifications. There are some members having had partial university education.

### The approach step by step

1. **Identification of the Participants**

   Citizens are invited to integrate in the Local Consultative Councils, depending on the local resources or strategies developed by EAPN Portugal regional network staff, involving when possible our members and other local social actors. The Local Council members can also be identified by the “snow ball” methodology which consists in disseminating information among the other participants, social professionals, and local EAPN Portugal partner organisations.

2. **Organisation**

   - **18 Local Consultative Councils** – These local committees work with EAPN Portugal, at local level, in the definition, implementation and evaluation of activities and projects. These committees are a base for the work carried out at national level and help promote the participation of citizens in shaping policies that affect their lives. These groups are convened monthly by EAPN Portugal regional network’s staff.
   - **National Consultative Council** – Each member of the national Committee is a representative of local groups – local committees/councils – that are in each district of Portugal. This structure meets every three months.

3. **Structure of the National Council of PEP**

   - 18 citizens experiencing poverty and/or social exclusion (one from each Local Council);
   - EAPN National Coordinator;
   - 3 EAPN staff members of the Development Office (responsible for supporting regional/district networks);
   - 2 EAPN staff members of the Projects and Research Office.
The work developed by EAPN Portugal with this Council is on the basis of the definition, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of projects / activities. This structure is an important way to promote participation, not only to listen to these persons but to define with them evaluation documents on the social policies and resources that exist to fight poverty and social exclusion in our country. It is also a way to know the reality and to draw society’s attention to the poverty phenomenon.

Examples of activities developed with the members of the National Consultative Council

Since 2009 EAPN Portugal organises a national meeting of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, where these members are active participants. The main objective of these meetings is to draw recommendations for policy-makers, identifying the problems and suggesting effective actions to fight poverty and social exclusion.

- Planning, organisation and participation of the members of the Consultative Councils in seminars, workshops, training and information sessions and other events promoted with them, within the scope of EAPN Portugal’s activities.
- Developing and using awareness-raising instruments on poverty and/or social exclusion, such as videos, photo exhibitions, booklets, etc.
- Evaluating social measures, and drawing recommendations for improvement, through participatory assessment and/or other methodologies that concur to this objective.
- Contributing to position papers, declarations and other documents to lobby decision making bodies.
- Participating in the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty and in other national and transnational projects or events focusing on participation and active citizenship.
- Developing other activities on poverty and/or social exclusion or on areas related to the empowerment and personal and social integration, of these citizens in line with EAPN Portugal’s work.

What worked well

The NCC participation has increased these citizens’ access to information and training. It has also improved their understanding of EAPN, the local social actions on poverty and social exclusion in Portugal and in Europe.

Participation in the Local Consultative Councils improves their self-esteem and strengthens social relations through coaching sessions and other resources that helps them plan their life pathways and develop strategies to problems they face.

Participation in events and national and transnational projects of some members of these Councils has been very positive for the exchange of knowledge and experiences.
Involvement in concrete actions, the position paper drafting and the direct contribution in disseminating these documents has been important, because they feel they are contributing ideas for the assessment of the social measures.

Impact on the Network

The NCC was the first participative structure of this kind in our country. This was and still is a great challenge with significant impact for the organisation:

- EAPN Portugal has been increasingly investing in preparation and training of local staff;
- More training on coaching, communication, participation and understanding EAPN Portugal has been organised for members of LCCs;
- New working methods - new analysis and new ways to access information on poverty and social exclusion have come out from the exchange of knowledge between social professionals and the people experiencing poverty;
- People living in poverty (members of LCCs) are actively involved in meetings with our members;
- Involvement of some members of the LCC in national and transnational events and projects that promote participation;
- More training and awareness-raising on participation among NGOs;
- Reinforced exchange of experiences on participation among grassroots’ organisations;
- Higher visibility of our organisation among people living in poverty and social exclusion;
- Greater visibility of our work in the media. The members of the LCC or NCC are the main actors passing on the messages;
- Reinforced lobbying with direct participation of the more disadvantaged people in symbolically important places, such as the Assembly of the Republic (national parliament).

Lessons learned

- Managing the initial expectations is difficult. This diversity of problems has to be covered in early meetings.
- Participation is only possible after covering initial steps, including information and training (for social professionals and people experiencing poverty). Without information there is no participation.
- Allocate sufficient time for understanding the principles of action of EAPN Portugal.
- Communication among members and with social professionals should be well ensured. Some people need more time to understand the topics discussed, to share their knowledge and of course this has an impact on the participation process.
- Be flexible and prepared to change or adapt the organisation of the work. Due to the inherent constraints of the living conditions of some participants, it is necessary
to readjust the schedules of meetings/activities, adapt working methods, etc.

- Participation is easier when we work in partnership, taking advantage of the resources and the exchange of experiences.
- Participation demands time and physical and relational proximity.
- Participating always means making efforts beyond the individual sphere… It is difficult to motivate, to feed, to implement and to give continuity to participation… But it is possible! We only have to be open to new forms of communication, planning and organisation of our work and our society.

Participation builds on participating!

Ana Cláudia Albergaria, claudia.albergaria@eapn.pt
Research and Projects Department, EAPN Portugal, www.eapn.pt

Testimony – a personal experience of participation

“Here we all speak the same language… we want to prove that we are human beings!

EAPN is an essential part of my life. One day in the past, I was on the street alone and with nothing, and it was in this reality that I really felt the difficulties and obstacles that people in this situation have to overcome. Here, in the Consultative Council of EAPN Portugal, I learned of situations much worse than mine… people with much inner richness but with dramatic lives without ways to break this circle and have a life away from poverty. Without EAPN these situations would never be known, not only because nobody is worried but also because if the people concerned don’t feel motivated, do not speak, they do not complain. Here we all speak the same language. We have all lived in great deprivation and we know what each of us felt with his/hers problems. I overcame mine!

My participation in the Consultative Council serves to encourage others to undertake the effort and to follow further on; but also we want to call the attention of the decision-makers and we want to show to our governors 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 this Council and with EAPN I had acquired great knowledge, I have grown up as a human being. My motivation is to con-
tribute so that all have a dignified life, a house, a job, education and access to culture. If throughout these years I helped a person... then all my participation was worthwhile!

The difficulties are mostly the lack of time or the conciliation of schedules, either for the elements that compose the Local Consultative boards, or for the social professionals who work with us.

The message that I want to pass is that all the people should think that one day they can also fall in the poverty trap. This is more and more a reality; the line is very tenuous. Today we have an organised and comfortable life and tomorrow we can lose everything and have nothing. It does not only happen to others!"

Adélia Fernandes, Member of the Local Consultative Council of Setúbal since 2009, and District representative in the National Consultative Council of People Experiencing Poverty and/or social exclusion of EAPN Portugal.
LOCAL AND REGIONAL ACTIONS ON THE PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Why we are working on participation

EAPN Spain is working to ensure that people living in poverty and/or social exclusion have their voice heard through the development of an innovative model of participation in social NGOs, but also through the empowerment of people for social and civic participation. EAPN Spain promotes the participation of people living in poverty and social exclusion and of their social NGOs through the development of policies and activities based on their interests and opinions, and equipping them with the means to achieve participation.
EAPN Spain is sharing two experiences of participation processes. These show how local and regional actions and methodologies, which are often compatible and could be stages of the same process, bring about the participation of people experiencing social exclusion.

Case Study 1: The participation of people as a tool for social inclusion in the Basque Country

Social organisations have called on EAPN Euskadi to develop a pilot experience of promoting participation of people in social organisations. Each organisation works with people who have different needs and work approaches, but they all have similar difficulties in initiating participation processes in social inclusion programmes: different languages, not knowing participation channels, lack of confidence and apprehension by professionals to opening up participation channels. Against this background, EAPN Euscadi analyzed the tools that organisations use to promote participation; the way these are being used and what people within the organisations think of them.

The objectives of the implemented experience include:

- Determine the degree of people’s participation in social organisations, including in planning and decision-making.
- Identify people’s specific needs concerning their active participation in social organisations.
- Identify people’s perceptions of the organisation and how they experience their social inclusion process.
- Evaluate the methodology used in the social inclusion programmes regarding people’s participation.
- Develop channels for people to be able to decide whether to participate in the social organisation or not.

The most innovative aspect of the experience we have carried out is two-fold:

- It consists of different organisations working with different groups, which will give comparable results and will facilitate the knowledge transfer. Furthermore, it will be necessary to use different techniques for each organisation.
- Secondly, the group uses its own experience, what is effectively being carried out, evaluates it and draws conclusions that will become theory.

The experience has been carried out in 7 social organisations in the Basque Country at the same time, including a federation which constitutes 4 organisations. Each organisation has a different working approach and the problems faced by the people they work with are different. The different methodologies have been adapted to both the organisations and the people. This will allow an easier future transfer to other realities.

Summary of each experience: While 7 social organisations have been involved, one of them has joined halfway through the process, meaning that no conclusions or future proposals can yet be established.
1. Fundación Gizakia: Work with adult people (mostly men) with drug addiction problems. Participation is implemented in each of the programmes carried out.

   a. Methodology: Questionnaire and group dynamics (discussion groups divided by programmes) in which the people assess each tool implemented by the foundation to promote participation.

   b. Proposals for improvement:

      i. A procedure manual is drawn up, establishing timelines and methods of responding to people’s demands.

      ii. To incorporate learning processes about active participation into the methodology of working with people.

2. Federación SARTU: Implementation in 4 organisations.

   a. The methodology. The process has been followed up by the same people in all the pilot experiences:

      i. Various professionals are selected in each of the programmes to be part of the process. The organisation's approach to participation is taken as the basis and shared with these people.

      ii. A number of sessions with the people who are to participate are established according to the following scheme. After each session, the professionals share the conclusions with the group of people taking part in the specific programme, collecting their opinions:

         01. Analysis of the specific programme from the participation perspective. Systematization of the experience.

         02. SWOT analysis.

         03. Identification of the actions / measures to be taken in relation to the social participation defined and identified.

   b. A specific programme in which to implement the pilot experience is selected by each organisation:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme and place of implementation</th>
<th>People profile</th>
<th>Proposals for improvement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilbao. Occupational Training.</strong></td>
<td>People profile has changed over the last years: 10% of foreigners vs. 90%, currently. Difficulties in being undocumented and with the language.</td>
<td>* Develop/adapt social intervention tools. * Develop/adapt new employment resources. * Develop “non professional” competences. * Networking. * Promote spaces for equal-to-equal relationships.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Durango. Maintenance Workshop.</strong></td>
<td>100% men. Two people profiles: Half are migrants without documents and the other half has mental health problems.</td>
<td>* Increase interaction between people within the group. * Encourage participation in budget management. * Increase the presence of workshops (in the organisation, in the community).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>San Sebastián. Roma Women’s Workshop.</strong></td>
<td>Roma women over 16. Referred from the social services.</td>
<td>* Increase assistance to women. * Increase women’s presence and visibility in all services (incorporate the gender perspective). * Promote spaces for reflection. * Promote women’s participation in their neighbourhoods. * Conciliation and joint responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vitoria. Red Sendotu.</strong></td>
<td>Network of organisations (social organisations, governmental organisations and people), Sendotu is working for social prevention, assistance and promotion from the gender perspective. Although a network of organisations, within it are also associations of vulnerable people (associations of migrant women, from rural backgrounds...).</td>
<td>* Implement common actions. * Promote female users’ participation in the network. * Get organisations inside and outside the network involved. * Develop and strengthen a common language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Asociación Elkarbanatuz: Work with adult migrants, mostly men from Africa within the 19 to 50 age range having families with minors under their responsibility.
   a. Methodology used: Reflection sessions on participation with professionals, which will later be joined by programme users in order to contrast the conclusions drawn. Evaluation of specific aspects of the programmes through assemblies.
   b. Proposals for improvement:
      i. Placement of the Cicerone figure (volunteer users) to welcome new-comers.
      ii. Assessment of the proposals for improvement and decision-making in conjunction with the users.

4. CEAR Euskadi: Adult migrants and asylum seekers. The pilot experience is implemented through the lobbying work of the organisation. It targets professionals not delivering direct services to migrants and asylum seekers; this creates an equal-to-equal relationship between professionals and users.
   a. Methodology: Discussion groups evaluate the participation programmes of CEAR. Workshops are carried out in which the roles professional-user are interchanged (workshops are organised by the people who use the organisation's services).
   b. Proposals for improvement:
      i. People associate participation with spaces that were not thought of as participation tools in the organisation. They regard these spaces as their own; to which they can contribute. The organisation changes the conception it has about participation programmes to adopt those proposed by the users.
      ii. A process is initiated to redefine the organisation’s social intervention process on the basis of the users’ proposals and expressed needs.

5. Asociación Bizitegi: Working with homeless people with drug addiction and/or mental health problems.
   a. Methodology: It is carried out in two different ways:
      i. Review and revision of satisfaction questionnaires that are passed around to people once a year in order to be able to have a participation evaluation.
      ii. Inclusion of users in the discussion groups to produce the organisation’s Strategic Plan.
   b. Proposal for improvement:
      i. A study will be carried out to continue exploring people’s needs and participation.

a. Methodology: A process of reflection is initiated in two senses:

i. Work on the apprehensions and difficulties faced by professionals in establishing participation processes. This is carried out through monthly work sessions with the professionals in charge of the three programmes for homeless people.

ii. Assessment of the existing participation processes by the people who attend the services is carried out through assemblies, satisfaction questionnaires and individualized tutorials.

b. Proposals for improvement:

i. The main problem is the reluctance on the part of the professionals to open up channels of participation, so work on group sessions will continue to be carried out every two months and the exchange of professionals between services will continue.

ii. The decisions made based on the users’ requests will be returned and assessed in conjunction with the service users.

Case study 2: The Participation of People at Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Castilla–La Mancha

This project, initiated in 2007, stems from two sources. One is related to the technical assessment of the II Regional Programme for Social Integration in Castilla - La Mancha, into which the recipients’ opinions of the social integration programmes must be incorporated. The other responds to the EAPN – Castilla – La Mancha (EAPN - CLM) commitment to regard participation as a key element, incorporating it as a methodological strategy to promote the inclusion of the most vulnerable people. On the one hand, an assessment process was set in place on the actions carried out by EAPN-CLM regarding inclusion and the impact of EAPN’s work on participation in Castilla - La Mancha. At the same time, professionals should receive tools that promote personal involvement and participation of people in their social inclusion processes.

The main objectives of the project are:

* Promote social organisations working with people at risk of social exclusion as spaces of empowerment for these people, through social participation processes implemented within them.

* Promote the influence on regional social integration policies through user evaluation of Social Integration Projects from the users’ point of view.
There are two recipient groups. On one hand, there are the users of social integration projects and programmes, and on the other, there are the professionals that work in the integration projects of the different modalities contemplated by PRIS (Regional Programme for Social Integration) developed by both the councils’ social services and the social organisations’ teams of our region.

This project shows how social inclusion can be addressed from a different perspective, beyond the personal difficulties, and highlights the sense of active citizenship and commitment to the community.

Throughout the development of the experience, we have found that the methodologies used in the training of professionals and the consultation processes with people enrolled in the social integration projects are valid. Furthermore, it allows for widening the impact in terms of involvement in regional policy-making.

As for the obstacles, we learned that public service administrators lack experience and skills and do not carry out participation processes. Also, it has been identified that there is a certain apprehension in establishing participation processes that can cause a loss of power in decision-making.

By carrying out this project it is intended to defend a formative model for professionals/administrators that shows how to incorporate social inclusion as a process in which decisions aiming at improving the community are made collectively.

**Social participation is also a right for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion!**

EAPN Spain Participation Group,
For more information, you can contact josejavier.lopez@eapn.es
Testimonies – personal experiences of participation

The following views are contained in discussion groups with people who are engaged in processes of social inclusion and participate in various inclusion projects in Castilla-La Mancha. Although it’s not directly in the feedback about their own participation, a desire can be noted; a certainty that they have to be part of the solution to their problems. Many participants want to join because they see they can learn from each other. They feel they have common problems which are not only about money. Often the support they need is more technical than economic (though they could use better financial support). The key point is feeling they are doing something, not just being ‘patients’. What they receive is not a social charity, but with some help, it is their own effort that will succeed.

“... If I go to City Hall and say “Hey, is there not a way to organise?, I want to know more people with the same interests as me and we can get something out and not only are always asking, but we also have things to give, right? Not only economic, but also ideas...”

“... People come to my house, a woman, look I have no work, I’m starving, comes another” I was fired I saw myself drowned, and then I ask “can’t we do anything together?””

“... Then you told me (referring to a municipal), “Why do you not join?” And we set up a partnership... and I say, we still have done virtually nothing. Starting with great enthusiasm, eager to do things... projects.”

“I’m working and they are helping me with my problems. I have a lot of excitement and it gives me great strength for the day to day. To face what happened, what we do not want to go back ... I see that my situation is very different now... “

“Me and a group of friends wanted to integrate with the Roma people. There are a lot in the neighbourhood.... how to integrate all together, do things together, workshops. Roma women cooking: They teach us, we them...”

“... And we are 8 girls from 8 countries. But the good thing is that we learn from each other. Let’s see, they do friendship, much like caring for people, for us.”
“I had no job, not knowing what to do. And I said, I have to do something ... He could not do nothing. Let me do. I will be involved in the NGO ... and then I get involved with immigrants. I got involved because I had to do something and did not want to stand apart from society...”

“In the projects that I’m involved in.. We, I don’t receive any grants or subsidies.... and we have never had any problems with money – never..!”

“I went to the NGO as a volunteer, I knew they gave training courses. Right now I do a food handler course. For other courses, I have listed. I will help the social meals project in Guadalajara.... It is an opportunity. I hope in the future I do well.”

“I also feel very comfortable, and I see people learn and I feel fine. I feel great. I’m doing something constructive. I have no experience (but) then I can look and say something that might change things...”
Why we are working on participation

We believe that people who experience poverty and social exclusion should be able to contribute to finding the solutions to the problems that affect their lives. (From our Strategic Plan)
**Brief context**

Involving people with experience of poverty has always been at the heart of the approach the Poverty Alliance, the anti-poverty network in Scotland, has taken to our work. Since being established almost 20 years ago, the Alliance has developed and supported a wide range of projects with a variety of approaches to support engagement in policy development. The experience of running these projects taught us a very important lesson – there needs to be a process to support participation. Too many projects around participation are under resourced, short term, and not linked to mainstream processes.

Since Scotland achieved its own Parliament in 1999 a number of anti-poverty strategies have been developed. Whilst these have often involved large scale consultations in their development, including with people experiencing poverty, they have not maintained a consistent engagement with people and organisations at the grassroots. The *Evidence, Participation, Change (EPIC) Project* was developed to demonstrate the value of consistent engagement and dialogue and to impact on policy development, monitoring and evaluation.

**Description of the case study**

EPIC is a four year project funded by the Big Lottery Fund, with almost €900,000 of funding. Its overall aim is to support people with experience of poverty, the grassroots community and voluntary organisations to influence the development of anti-poverty policy. There are three key elements to the project:

1. **training** for grassroots groups to help them understand how change can be made,
2. support for **participatory research** to enable communities to generate their own evidence, and
3. establishing **participatory forums** to bring together policy makers and people with experience of poverty, and community and voluntary groups to influence the development of policy.

The project employs a Community Research Officer, a Policy and Parliamentary Officer and an Administrative Assistant to support this work. Below we focus on the experience of one of the forums set up under the project.

**Creating Spaces for Dialogue – the Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum**

The Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum is made up of around 40 members; one third senior level national and local government civil servants, one third voluntary sector workers and one third people with experience of poverty. The forum meets every six
months to review the progress made on the ‘Achieving our Potential’ anti poverty framework for Scotland. The forum is membership-based which means that the same people meet on a regular basis, thus creating continuity and accountability. Working groups are formed to take forward key issues between meetings. The themes are collectively agreed by members of the forum. There have been three short-life working groups so far focusing on health inequalities, stigma of people living in poverty and child poverty.

The overall objective of the Forum 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 the policy outcomes. It aims to create a space where people can gather as equals and work towards creating improved anti poverty policy making. It also allows monitoring of the anti poverty framework, highlighting where progress is being made and where weaknesses remain.

What works well

There are many positive aspects of the Forum.

* It creates a space for **regular** dialogue between people with experience of poverty, alongside community and voluntary organisations and civil servants who are responsible for anti poverty policy making. Such regular dialogue does not exist elsewhere and it brings benefits both for those looking to influence policy and for policy makers. Policy makers have said that they don’t have enough opportunity to hear directly from people who are affected by their policies.

* A **highly focused** approach. By using thematic working groups the Forum can help to have a real impact on policy. The first working group on health inequalities directly influenced the content of the review of the health inequality policy in Scotland. The working group was made up of five community activists and six policy makers with the support of the policy and parliamentary officer. Preparation work was carried out with the activists, allowing them to engage with the broader community. Two meetings were then held with policy makers, the first clarifying the role of the policy makers and discussing key issues, the second in which the policy makers fed back on progress on the review and how their views were taken into account. The process was completed with a meeting between the Minister for Public Health and the community activists.

Why was the working group on health inequality successful?

1. The **reasons for participation were clear**, resulting in realistic expectations for all participants.

2. **Preparation meetings** were held with other community members. Those involved in the working group were not simply reflecting on their own experience but could draw on that of others in their community.
3. The senior level civil servant who took the lead on this working group had a very good understanding of participation and ensured that the right aspects were put in place.

4. Time was spent understanding the roles and responsibilities of the policy makers meaning that people involved were clearer on how policy making happens and what the possibilities and the limitations are.

5. There was upfront commitment from the policy makers to feed back to the group after hearing their experiences. This addressed the ‘consultation fatigue’ that is so often an unintended outcome of such processes.

6. A respectful and real dialogue was created between the participants which enabled a two way exchange, rather than a one sided extraction of information.

**Challenges of this approach**

1. **Engagement:** It is a complex and time consuming process to create a network of people who have experience of poverty and are willing to get involved. There are a number of reasons for this: people do not like being labeled as ‘poor’; there is mistrust and cynicism about politics and whether change can happen; influencing policy is intangible and results do not come about quickly. To overcome some of these challenges we have been clear from the start about the process and what can and cannot be achieved. We have also tried to emphasize the benefits that some individuals would experience: gaining confidence, increasing social networks, meeting others, getting their voice heard, being part of a movement.

2. **Context:** No matter how well a process is set up, it is clear that it does not operate in a vacuum and that the political context will have a significant impact. The Stakeholder Forum was established in 2009, when the economic climate was creating difficulties in delivering the anti-poverty strategy in Scotland. Change in Government at the UK level has led to a significant change of direction in welfare policy. This can be a disheartening context for people who are attempting to influencing policy, as it may appear that many demands are being ignored.

**Lessons learned and impact on the Network**

The EPIC project is at the half way point and there are some clear lessons starting to emerge from it. The overall aim of the project is to create processes where people feel that they are better able to influence anti poverty policy. There are challenges in doing this in the current economic and political climate. Whilst we have made progress with the EPIC project, we still need to firmly root the Forum (and other parts of the project) in the Scottish ‘policy making’ structures. Ensuring that this happens will ensure that participation becomes simply part of the way we ‘do’ policy in Scotland.
But to deliver this kind of genuine participation still requires real resources. Even with generous funding, following up all the issues that emerge through the engagement process has been a challenge. Clarifying priorities, developing specific actions with those that we are working with and building alliances with others are all crucial to making participation work. It is important to show where the views and experiences of those who have taken part are having an impact on policy, where change is actually happening.

The experience of the EPIC project has reaffirmed the need for processes of dialogue and that there are real benefits to be gained from long term engagement of grassroots groups in national policy development. It is not enough for policy makers to simply hear the testimony of those in poverty then return to ‘business as usual’. They must commit to finding solutions to poverty with those that experience it. In these challenging economic times participation may seem like an unnecessary luxury, but we believe that it is in fact more essential than ever if we are to identify the right solutions to the real problems.

Reaching out to different community groups

The Poverty Alliance EPiC project has worked with many community groups and individuals with experience of poverty and has produced, in the process, important reflections of these groups on anti poverty policy in Scotland. Some of these groups include:

- Women’s groups in Glasgow
- Youth groups in Stirling and Edinburgh: see the briefing Young People and Transition: Lost Sheep Looking for Somewhere to Go?
- A homeless group based in Inverclyde
- Elderly groups based in Inverclyde and Aberdeen
- A community group based in a poor area of Glasgow that brings different parts of the community together through educational activities. [www.playbusters.org.uk/articles/article.php?articleID=2](http://www.playbusters.org.uk/articles/article.php?articleID=2)

Sarah Welford, Policy and Parliamentary Officer, The Poverty Alliance, Member of EAPN UK, [sarah.welford@povertyalliance.org](mailto:sarah.welford@povertyalliance.org)
"After battling for two years with a petition to the Scottish Parliament (NHS 24) and getting no response from MPSs, I asked Peter Kelly at the Poverty Alliance if he could help me. He sign posted me to the new EPIC project which had just been set up. I went on the first training session that they held and have become more and more involved since then. I have become a member of the Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum. On the Stakeholders Forum I have participated in three short-life working groups:

1. Health Inequalities – focusing on the Scottish Government’s review of their health strategy. I focused on the impact of poverty on children’s health in their early years.

2. Stigma – this group looked at how we could better challenge the stigma associated with living in poverty especially those receiving benefits. I have been involved with making a short film and the stigma statements campaign “Stick your labels!”


These three groups have allowed me to engage with Members of the Scottish Parliament, government officials and policy makers to give my own and my communities’ views on their policies.

My feelings and what I found useful about the EPIC project

To me the EPIC project has been a Godsend. I have had a chance to learn about politics, learn the jargon and have been able to work with policy makers, something I could never have done before as an individual.

I have learnt how to petition Parliament and 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 tutors have helped me with accessing networks, helped me type up reports and supported me 100% which due to my disability I could not otherwise have achieves all that I have. Instead of sitting and moaning about issues, I now challenge them.

With the help of EPIC my two main campaigns have now been put into operation.

My first campaign on making calls to NHS 24 free from mobiles, has had an e-petition submitted, its first committee hearing has taken place and I am now awaiting the results of a pilot test to see whether it is feasible to put in place. Without EPIC I could have never have addressed this. I am currently also in the process of liaising with a Member of Parliament, on a new school clothing grant petition.

Over all EPIC’s great achievements is that we are actually seeing the results of what EPIC has campaigned for e.g. the five leaders of the Scottish Political Parties have signed up to the stigma statement.

EPIC has given me a ‘voice’ and allowed me to be ‘heard’.”

Caroline Mockford, member of the Tackling Poverty Stakeholder Forum
Why we are working on participation

Participation of those who are unemployed or benefit claimants ensures that the organisation does not become removed from its purpose, aims and objectives. The organisation tries to put into practice the slogan ‘nothing about us without us.’ We need to organise ourselves to involve people in our work. Expenses need to be met, a social aspect to the involvement experience should be prioritised and personal development encouraged.
Introduction

Justine is 36 and unemployed. In the past she has had many jobs in factories, pubs, shops and with cleaning agencies. Justine has two children, one at college and working part-time and one at school with a paper round. She has always participated in voluntary work in schools and in community organisations. Leaving school at 14 when her parents split up and starting work in a factory when she was 15, she has no formal qualifications. The jobs she has had have not been very rewarding with little personal or career development. Even poor quality jobs are scarce in the area where she lives.

Justine becomes very upset when people look down on those who are unemployed and dismiss lightly the problems that they face. She believes people who have never had to deal with the employment services and their outsourced off shoots do not understand what they have to go through. Justine spends a lot of time looking for, and applying for jobs. She became involved in her local Unemployed Workers’ Centre as a volunteer.

In attempting to become an advice worker her role involves training courses and other opportunities. Justine says “just because you are unemployed it does not mean you are a lazy scrounger as portrayed in the Media.”

Description of the approach

The Unemployed Workers’ Centre (UWC) is actively involved in the UK Anti-Poverty Network and has built a fine reputation for its campaigning work on issues around unemployment and benefits. The organisation does not see its service users as ‘clients’ but as people with which there is a common cause. The advisers in the Centre, even those who are paid, were all once unemployed and volunteers. The UWC has always integrated and involved the people who come to us for help, in the campaigns with which we engage. The Management Committee is largely made up of people who are out of work or claiming benefits, seconding others to ensure the necessary expertise and wide community involvement.

Participation of those who are unemployed or benefit claimants ensures that the organisation does not become removed from its purpose, aims and objectives. The organisation tries to put into practice the slogan ‘nothing about us without us.’ This standpoint is taken to the Network meetings and is a shared philosophy across member organisations. The ‘Get Heard’ initiative of anti poverty organisations in the UK\(^4\) embodies this approach with organisations trying to bring the perspective of people experiencing poverty to the attention of policy makers. The toolkit produced gave comprehensive guidelines on the development of inclusive meetings, both in terms of accessibility and participation. The UWC has been applying these guidelines in its everyday work and decision-making. About 30 unemployed volunteers are active at the Centres.

14. The Get Heard toolkit can be found here: www.ukcap.org/getheard/downloads.htm
The services provided by UWC include:

- Benefit checks
- Completion of claim forms
- Liaising with DWP/Inland Revenue/Local Authorities
- Representation at benefit tribunal
- Take up campaigns
- On-site redundancy advice.

Challenges that job-seekers face

Participation in the field of unemployment has always been very difficult. Being out of work is an isolating experience. People are denied the social context of the workplace with its shared concerns and experiences. The government, ably assisted by the media, tries to individualise the problem of unemployment, placing the responsibility firmly with those who are out of work. The problems that unemployment causes to the person are a huge barrier to participation in civil society. The pressure to do nothing other than look for work plus the psychological effects of being labelled inadequate for being unemployed add to the difficulties. Financial issues mean that long term planning becomes impossible with immediate basic needs the priority. Choices are limited and the wider picture of the shared concerns with others becomes ever narrower. The problems that the individual faces seem insurmountable so how can an unemployed person concern themselves with the issues of others?

The role of organisations providing participation opportunities for unemployed people

It is in this context that we all must assess the participation of unemployed people within our organisations. These difficulties must not be an excuse for inaction but they provide a constant reminder of how we need to organise ourselves to include people out of work. Expenses need to be met, a social aspect to the involvement experience should be prioritised and personal development encouraged.

Justine took all the training opportunities made available to her in the role of volunteer adviser. She takes an interest in the issues that come out of the work itself. The Unemployed Workers’ Centres do not see advice work as an end in itself as it is often just used as a ‘sticking plaster’ to cover up the problems caused by economic circumstance and punitive policies. The advisers at the Centres are always trained to look out for the wider issues emanating from the cases that people bring through our doors.

The EAPN network helped organise meetings with people experiencing poverty that Justine attended. As a result of this work she was encouraged to take part in a campaign on adequate minimum income. A number of people sent a letter to the Chancellor calling on him to raise the level of minimum incomes. The correspondents likened
their pressing budget problems and weekly deficit to the much publicised national debt crisis. As a result Justine made her first appearance on local radio talking about her difficulties and the motivation behind the campaign. Justine’s involvement led her to take part in the EAPN Conference on Minimum Income held in Brussels, representing the UK Network. She was interested and enthused through meeting and listening to the experiences of others, particularly those in Eastern Europe. Justine read on the subject and pledged to maintain her involvement. The UK Network had for some time been interested in taking up an idea that evolved from the Employment Working Group at EAPN. The plan was for unemployed workers to keep a diary of their journey in looking for work in a recession. The diary would cover both the interaction with the organisations and bureaucracies involved in benefits claims and job search as well as the emotional and practical difficulties of living on a low income. Justine was keen to get involved and began her blog which can be found at www.justine-diaryofajobseeker.blogspot.com

Justine’s story is one which highlights how the obstacles to participation of unemployed people in the Networks can be overcome. It links involvement with active campaigning and builds in personal development. The obstacles and barriers must not be underestimated but should not be used to deny participation.

Nothing about us without us!

Colin Hampton, colin.hampton@hotmail.co.uk, Derbyshire Unemployed Workers’ Centres, www.duwc.org.uk

Testimony – a personal experience of participation

“I used the service of the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers’ Centre myself when I had to transfer from Income support due to a change in law, which involved tax credits, and child benefit numbers etc. The confusion left me with no income for a short while. Not knowing where to turn, is when I saw the sign for DUWC.

Also a close family member of mine had been ill and went for a medical check to determine what support she could get, which I attended with her. When she failed the medical I thought there was a mix up as the things in the submission papers were very contradictory, especially as I had been there to witness the whole situation.

Eventually after living on a reduction in her income for almost a year I went to Tribunal with her and a rep, and the decision was overturned in her favour. The whole process made her worse than ever. But this was
another thing which made me become interested in helping others who face these difficulties daily. It seems there is very little real support, other than the agencies such as the DUWC.

I wanted to train in an area which I felt would be of use to the community and to my family. I am passionate about people and found out a lot about the issues affecting people already in poverty.

I like to challenge people’s opinions to aid equality and I also want a job. Being a volunteer at the UWC has helped me gain new skills and be involved in my community. I have started an online diary project on my experience of job-hunting. I hope this project will help those who work in the unemployment services to understand the difficulties a job-seeker faces. You can read my diary blog at the following address: http://justine-diaryofajobseeker.blogspot.com.

Justine Bark, Volunteer Welfare Rights Adviser and Campaigner
Why we are working on participation

Being deprived of participation means not having a voice, not being able to count on others; not being able to exercise citizenship rights and responsibilities. In general, not taking into account the voices of the excluded is an act of violence against them and a risk of increased social violence and breakdown. Citizen participation is a matter of democracy and access to fundamental rights.
Starting up a political process

The founders of ATD Fourth World, Joseph Wresinski and the families of the “Homeless camp” in Noisy-le-Grand near Paris, started out in 1957 with a political objective: a better life not just for them, but for their children, and for no-one ever to have to suffer from poverty as they did.

Their entire life experience had taught them that they had no chance of achieving that aim alone - others had to stand full-square with them, and it would take political action. Since then, thousands of extremely poor people from all continents have joined together with people from all walks of life to take up that challenge and to be part of a global aspiration for justice.

Knowledge overlooked

While in many countries commitments to tackle poverty are relatively strong, most initiatives focus on the same hurdle: institutions, politicians, academic researchers, professional providers, even with the best of intentions, devise solutions based on how they see the causes of poverty. Too often, the women and men who are experiencing extreme poverty are seen only in terms of their problems and of what they do not have and need. Because their understanding is overlooked, they become the object of other people’s action, excluded from helping to develop our common future, outside the realms of democracy. They have to work with solutions that others have devised for them. Solutions which, developed with a disregard for their experience and vision, too often never work out in the long term.

The Fourth World People’s Universities

Believing that action can be effective only if it includes what those living in extreme poverty know, ATD Fourth World founded the Fourth World People’s Universities in 1972. The belief that people experiencing the severest poverty have knowledge derived from experience about themselves and their condition, of the world around them that makes them experience these situations of poverty, on how things need to be to halt the exclusion of the most vulnerable, was not enough. The means to enable that knowledge to emerge and become communicable had to be put in place.

The Fourth World People’s Universities are run in multiple stages: reaching out to the most vulnerable people in the places where they live, seeking their opinion, drawing out their experience. There is a gradual realization of the fact that they contribute, that they have things to say which is of interest to others. This awakening is vital for those who have always been ignored to dare to participate in local meetings.

15. Et vous que pensez-vous ? L’Université populaire Quart Monde, Françoise Ferrand, Ed Quart Monde, 1996

These meetings are the second, equally important, stage in which, in a climate of trust, everyone attempts to give voice to what they think and feel, and has the experience of not feeling judged and being taken seriously however clumsily expressed. They find that others are in the same boat. That prompts further self-reflection, overcoming shame and guilt to venture new thoughts. This is done by sharing news about their daily life, and working on a very wide range of specific topics.

A monthly regional meeting brings together participants from different local groups, people from other walks of life who have made preparations together or individually, and often one or more invited “guests” relevant to the topic discussed. Local groups give feedback and a dialogue is created with participants. These topics are chosen out of local groups’ discussion or with reference to topical events.

Fourth World People’s Universities or very similar processes are currently run in a number of European countries. They are held every two years in a European Fourth World University where members of European institutions are invited and NGOs.

Merging knowledge and practices

The Fourth World People’s Universities gave rise to experimental programmes on merging knowledge and practices, where people experiencing extreme poverty, ATD Fourth World activists, academic researchers and training professionals compared their questions, worked out propositions, shared their knowledge, combined their insights and finally produced a body of jointly-written work on issues critical to the fight against extreme poverty.

Merging knowledge is not “giving a voice” to those experiencing poverty first-hand. Everyone is a co-protagonist and co-researcher in the process from start to finish. Everyone has input into the final output.

Merging knowledge and practices is played out in training, research and action.

Dozens of co-training sessions have been held since 2003, bringing together up to fifteen professionals, a number of people who have experienced extreme poverty and exclusion, and a training team of at least 2 people — one with a professional background, the other with one of poverty — which is responsible for putting in place the preconditions for merging.

A co-training session involves work on communication, perceptions, time for getting to know one another’s realities, writing and analysing accounts of experiences from different angles. It highlights and puts into practice the essential conditions for participation and partnership.

17. See the charter on merging knowledge and practice with people experiencing poverty (in French) on www.croisementsavoirs.org

The work is interactive and assumes personal involvement by all.

“The professionals’ priorities are geared to housing, food, heating, health... Our priorities are more general: our children’s future, for them to have a good education, the ability to choose what is most important to us... They need us to discuss with them because we don’t see things the same way. They talk about will, control, vital needs; we talk about struggle, freedom, privacy, rights” (Quotes from people experiencing poverty)

“We became aware that the conditions of the meeting were different: in an office, those living in extreme poverty demand and expect to get something. In a co-training situation, we have come together to develop through listening to one another. The members of the ATD Fourth World group are training up to speak on behalf of other people experiencing extreme poverty”. (Quotes from professionals)

What outputs does this merging have?  
This original way of bringing actors together in an encounter gives rise to epiphanies. The joint work helps all those involved develop communication skills and the ability to understand environments alien to them, to forge partnerships.

The merging of knowledge deconstructs preconceptions and half-baked not say wrong thinking, to develop a more accurate understanding of the reality, and thereby to change professional, institutional, social and political practices to ensure universal access to rights for all.

For people experiencing extreme poverty to become co-researchers and co-protagonists dramatically changes everyone’s roles. Merging knowledge looks ahead to a society where everyone has a place.

Marie-Jahrling-Apparicio is a Fourth World activist of decades’ standing. She has taken part in the Fourth World People’s Universities and the Merging of Knowledge and Practices programmes on “People in Poverty and Academics Thinking Together,” “People in Poverty and Professionals Training Together” and is a member of the International Joseph Wresinski Centre’s Ethics Committee. This testimony is from the preface to the book “Merging of Knowledge.”

Marie-Cécile Renoux,  
ATD 4th World Delegate to the European Union, marie-cecile.renoux@atd-quartmonde.org

Testimony – a personal experience of participation

Marie Jahrling-Apparicio is a Fourth World activist of decades’ standing. She has taken part in the Fourth World People’s Universities and the Merging of Knowledge and Practices programmes on “People in Poverty and Academics Thinking Together,” “People in Poverty and Professionals Training Together” and is a member of the International Joseph Wresinski Centre’s Ethics Committee. This testimony is from the preface to the book “Merging of Knowledge.”


“I remember the Noisy-le-Grand shanty town. The mud and the living conditions meant that we never went unnoticed. We were the outsiders – outside the norms, outside society. We very often used to come upon my mother weeping, however much of a brave face she tried to put on things in front of others. Her tears and her ill health are still inside me in the rage I feel against the injustice that is exclusion caused by poverty.

I never used to tack the word “exclusion” onto what my life was, because I felt being poor was my fault. When I left the shanty town, my one concern was not to be noticed. Some hope. The fact is that when I went back, it was like breathing, getting back to my people, a world where everyone is the same – bowed down, but all equal.

I took up the fight when I became aware of the injustice that we were experiencing – no longer to blame, but a victim, and then a fighter. Fighting against the exclusion that is poverty. Joseph Wresinski asked everyone to shoulder their responsibilities in the fight, to become aware of their personal value to better appreciate themselves and by getting involved with others, to form a force for attacking poverty.

We trained in the Fourth World People’s Universities, people from different towns and cities in different countries. We came to recognize ourselves as a people experiencing the injustice of extreme poverty. We learned to understand ourselves as thinking beings capable of reflective thought, to be empowered, to stand up for our ideas, to communicate with others. Then to work with academics and professionals. To have carried out research with them, merged our knowledge, written things together – madness! It started out as beyond imagining, but we actually did it – it isn’t a dream! With the academics, it was about encountering knowledge that we didn’t have – sociological and historical knowledge; with the professionals, it was about overcoming our fears, prejudices and preconceptions, dispelling the setbacks suffered in our lives with teachers, doctors, judges, social workers, etc. We did it for our people, for a brighter future.

Other activists from the poor community are standing up and moving forward. We are still at the beginnings of getting the voices of the poor-
est heard. A voice to understand which direction we need to take so that everyone has the best chance. We have the experience of what cannot go on. The days of saying that extreme poverty is inevitable are done. It is not inevitable. I have faith in the work we are doing with academics and the different institutions. If we find the resources to train one another together, we can change practices that have largely failed to deliver against extreme poverty”.

Marie Jahrling, ATD 4th World Activist
Why we are working on participation

Our mission is to develop an inclusive society for all ages. This can be achieved through a long-lasting cooperation between older people themselves, on the one hand, and public authorities and all other relevant stakeholders, on the other hand, in view of a common ownership of the way our societies are organised. Active participation of older people in society, including policy-making processes, should lead eventually to further improvements in the quality of life for older people and enhance their dignity.
It is widely recognised as a fundamental principle of the European social inclusion process that all stakeholders need to participate in the development of solutions to combat poverty and social exclusion in order to ensure that policies meet the needs of the target groups and are implemented in the most efficient way. In practice, however, policymakers rarely consult people confronted with poverty and social exclusion and, even less often, older people experiencing poverty and/or social exclusion.

Against the above rationale, the INCLUSage project was designed to encourage national governments and policymakers to consult regularly with older people experiencing poverty and/or different forms of exclusion. During 2008-2010, AGE member organisations from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland and Slovakia implemented a social inclusion project, INCLUSage – Debating Older People’s Need.

Over the project duration the national partners together with AGE developed a ‘Guide for Civil Dialogue on Promoting Older People’s Social Inclusion’ to establish a permanent framework for consultation and participation of older people experiencing poverty together with other relevant stakeholders in the national and local debates and policy-making on social inclusion.

Major aims and objectives of the action:

- Encourage national governments and policy makers to consult regularly with older people confronted with poverty and/or different forms of exclusion.
- Involve all relevant actors dealing directly with older people’s issues or having impact on this population in their work, such as, ministries, national parliaments, health and transport providers, municipal executives, youth organisations, human rights bodies, police, education institutions, cultural centres, media, etc.
- Establish and enhance cross-level dialogue and coordination: bring together civil servants responsible for drafting and coordinating the National Strategy on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSRs) with those who follow their implementation on the ground in the regions and at the local level.
- Discuss the development of new indicators for social inclusion such as non-monetary ones i.e. focused on the ‘quality of life’ aspects, ranging from adequate living standards, access to health and social services, contact with family, friends and neighbourhood, level of civic participation, etc.

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Target of our project

Our actions targeted the whole spectrum of actors that are or should be engaged in debating older people’s well-being and elaborating national social inclusion strategies in order to address needs and requests of older people. Older people, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, together with their organisations engaged in regular debates with policy-makers at all levels and other actors from inside and outside social field, such as service providers, private sector, educational institutions, media etc. The objective of targeting all these various actors was to mobilize their respective knowledge and resources in order to ultimately improve the daily lives of older people.

What worked well

The project revealed a growing interest among older people and their organisations to follow policy debate and take active part in elaborating, implementing and monitoring policy developments. Experience from all participating countries also confirmed that older people want to and can speak up about their own issues. There are also some encouraging examples in most of the partner countries where bilateral contacts established with policy makers during the project facilitated a consensus on how to improve social inclusion in old age in long term perspective.

We hope that the cooperation, in particular with local policy-makers, will last and some of the authorities we were in contact with during the project will now establish permanent consultation frameworks for older people organisations. Reaching and engaging in discussion with older people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is a complex process and must be a long-term strategy with older people’s organisations and policy makers, in order to facilitate and implement a genuine exchange with vulnerable citizens.

Challenges of the project

Decision-makers often do not want to give more ‘power’ to civil society or even formally recognise its role and influence. There is also a tendency to avoid consultation on controversial issues but rather to focus on those that hold a particular interest for decision-makers.

Most decision-makers underestimate the capacity of civil society to take an active role in shaping policies. There is a need for legal frameworks for civil dialogue which set up rules and clarify the objectives of the process.

In the absence of formal structures for civil dialogue, older people’s organisations can mobilise their own resources, knowledge and experience in order to take part in policy-making and formulate concrete proposals for policy development.

In terms of alliances with other population groups at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion, the project re-confirmed that in order to shape and influence social inclusion
policy, older people need to coordinate lobbying with other groups, such as young people, women, disabled, various minorities etc. However, they are often reluctant to cooperate, which is not due to their little interest in civil dialogue as such, but rather to the lack of practice and tradition of cooperating among civil society on common issues.

**Additional findings**

In order to continue and broaden the process of debating older people’s needs (in view of improving general knowledge about ageing), the INCLUSage project formulated a series of recommendations that can be summarised around the following two proposals:

- Consultations set in order to collect views of ordinary older people and their organisations must become compulsory and cover not only topics directly related to their needs, but also those referring to a wider scope of decision making (e.g. education, employment, security);
- Municipal, local or community participatory initiatives involving older people, for example senior councils are a prerequisite of an inclusive society; such bottom-up governance strengthens direct involvement of an ageing population and is complementary to the representative democracy processes.

**Implications for relevant stakeholders**

**Policy makers**

The project developed a ‘Guide for Civil Dialogue on Promoting Older People’s Social Inclusion’ which presents recommendations: firstly, on how older people’s organisations can empower older people to take an active role in policy debates and how they can participate successfully in policy-making processes and; secondly, on how public authorities should support older people and their organisations in order to implement a sustainable civil dialogue on policy-making with regard to ageing issues.

**Opinion-makers including mass media, journalists**

By disseminating information to the local media, the project brought attention to older people’s issues and their specific needs in terms of “quality of life”. The partners looked not only to cooperate with other traditional anti-poverty NGOs, but rather to promote high profile debates and new alliances with a broader spectrum of partners, including media - in particular from local level – so that they can convey the messages about older people’s needs and raise awareness about the social realities of the most vulnerable.

Maciej Kucharczyk, AGE Platform Europe, maciej.kucharczyk@age-platform.eu
"My name is Brigitte Paetow. I am 71 years old and an active volunteer in the lobby for the elderly in our federal state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. An important issue for us is the increase of poverty in old age because of increasingly longer periods of unemployment. According to the Poverty Atlas published 2007 in Germany, our state has the highest proportion of people in risk of becoming poor.

When a possibility to join a European project “INCLUSage – Debating Older People’s Needs” lead by AGE Platform Europe appeared in late 2008, we applied to participate in order to strengthen civil dialogue between public authorities and older people together with their organisations on social inclusion in old age. This is because the past has shown that administrative measures alone are not enough to improve social realities of many older people.

Poverty and social exclusion constitute a threat to democracy. Therefore, it is important that NGOs combat such a development effectively. What could be more natural than to connect with those, who are affected by poverty? But this way was not easy. Poverty-stricken older people very rarely and reluctantly speak in public about difficulties they face. In most cases the reason is shame, but some also fear that public authorities will shift the responsibility to deal with poverty onto the younger generation. Nobody likes to be a burden to their own children. Such fears and prejudice can only be dispelled through personal contacts and interviews. So we found our participants in the workshops."
I was impressed by the variety of concerns that older people expressed. They often shared bitterness about the fact that personal circumstances sometimes did not fit the rigid legal requirements, and therefore, could not be considered. Our interview partners now count on us. We cannot and do not want to disappoint this trust. These two quotes at the end of workshops illustrate this: “If you do not talk about this topic, nothing can be changed. This day has made me feel good. It was good that the discussion group was not larger.”

I share the assessment of the National Poverty Conference, organised by EAPN Germany, that the 2010 European Year against poverty and social exclusion in Germany did not get the necessary attention at the political level. It is therefore important that NGOs continue to keep a long-term pressure on this issue. In the evaluation of the workshops, the country’s senior citizens advisory board does not see an end of talks with stakeholders, but recognizes this as a requirement for a continuing dialogue between all relevant stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty.”

Brigitte Paetow, Chairwoman of the regional Senior Citizens’ Council in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern State (LSB MV), Germany
Why we are working on participation

We cannot work on children’s rights without seeking to hear what children have to say and understand their points of view. Involving them in our activities and giving them a voice is a way to turn the participation principle into reality.
Promoting the participation of children and young people is a core objective and a cross-cutting issue in all the activities of Eurochild, in application of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child principle of the right of children to be heard and to express their opinion in all matters that affect them.

Eurochild members are committed to empower children and young people to participate in policy making processes at national and EU level. Many also involve children in their own decision making processes and service delivery. Focus is particularly on those children and young people who are the most vulnerable and are therefore less likely to have their voices heard.

The 2010 European Year against poverty and social exclusion provided the opportunity not only to raise awareness on the importance of giving a voice to children but also to strengthen Eurochild’s participation work through the involvement of disadvantaged and vulnerable children in different interconnected activities throughout the year, some of which are portrayed below.

1. Youth meeting on child poverty and social exclusion

In July 2010, 33 children and young people aged between 11 and 18 years old gathered in Brussels to discuss child poverty and social exclusion. They were selected from Eurochild member organisations in 9 different countries working directly with children. Some were vulnerable children or came from disadvantaged backgrounds.

During the one-week meeting the children had the opportunity to learn about the situation of children experiencing poverty in other countries, which policies had been put in place to combat poverty and debate what could, in their opinion and according to their own experience, be done to end child poverty. They also got acquainted with Eurochild petition to End Child Poverty and enthusiastically took on the role of ‘ambassadors’ of the campaign upon returning to their own countries.

All the activities were organised building on participatory approaches allowing children to express themselves and empowering them as their own agents of change. Activities included three main components: group building; learning and exchange of experience; and building consensus.

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23. www.eurochild.org/index.php?id=208&L=0&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=531&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=185&cHash=95a4d8
24. www.endchildpoverty.eu
The children met with representatives of EU institutions and of the EU Belgian Presidency and this meant a lot for them. They were able to exchange their views directly with policy makers and deliver their agreed messages on how best to tackle child poverty.

Later in the year, some of the children participated at an EU Belgian Presidency conference on child poverty and well-being where videos prepared by the children during their meeting in July were presented. The messages agreed at the July meeting were also delivered to the President of the European Commission and to the Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Commissioner alongside an event at the European Parliament where children presented what they had done in their countries to promote the fight against child poverty.

2. Participation and improving service delivery

This example is one of the case studies described in Eurochild publication “Valuing children’s potential: How children’s participation can contribute to fighting poverty and social exclusion.”

Eurochild UK member Action for Children has developed an approach on how to involve children and young people in recruitment and selection processes. The degree of participation varies according to the type of vacancy, the nature of project that is recruiting, and the interest, ability and understanding of the children and young people involved.

The involvement of children and young people in recruitment is considered right at the start of the process. All project managers embarking on a new recruitment campaign receive prompts which highlight the organisation’s commitment to participation and sign-post appropriate resources and guidance. This ensures that children’s involvement is considered early and avoids common pitfalls like lack of time to develop an approach or to properly prepare children for the role. Different tools are available to adapt to the age (as early as 6 years-old), ability and interest of the children or young people involved.

Attention is also paid to ensure that at the start of each recruitment process, the children know what is required of them, what their role is, and what influence they will have on the outcome of the recruitment process. It makes them feel valued and respected throughout their involvement.

27. www.actionforchildren.org.uk
28. www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/43263/the-right-choice.pdf
What worked well

1. Youth event
   * By sharing experiences and working around a specific theme made children feel part of a cause that transcended national boundaries.
   * There was a real dialogue between the children and decision makers.
   * Feedback both from the children, the member organisations and decision makers involved was very positive.

2. Participation and improving service delivery
   * Children’s evaluations following every recruitment have been very positive.
   * Staff involved in the recruitment process and prospective candidates both value the children’s input.

Challenges of the approaches

* Children are often reluctant to talk about their experiences for fear of stigmatization, especially when they come from different countries or backgrounds.
* Language is a barrier. Using only English excludes many children from participating.
Formal interpreters can break the natural exchange. Eurochild ensures some of the participating young people have enough English to interpret informally. Facilitators also need to be careful to use child-friendly language and avoid EU jargon or technical terms.

- Need to be open to what children have to say even if that means outcomes will be different than those initially expected.
- Adults often underestimate children’s capacity to express themselves and think children are too immature to understand and have a say on what are considered ‘adult issues’.
- Funding for participation activities is not considered a priority. In the face of budget cuts many participation projects are under threat, including the one described here.

Impact and lessons learned

- The success of the youth event opened the door and encouraged Eurochild and member organisations to carry out similar activities at EU and national level.
- Children created strong bonds and are still in contact with each other and with Eurochild through social networks.
- Follow-up was done at national level with children engaging in a series of activities to promote the End Child Poverty campaign, share the experience and participate at events in the framework of the European year.
- The event provided a basis for developing future and ongoing participation of children in Eurochild and its members organisations work.
- Recruitment proved to be an opportunity to share power and decision making between adults and children benefiting service users, staff, and the wider organisation – and helping making better choices.
- Involving children in recruitment processes became a practice across Action for Children’s work and a commitment to ensuring all staff ‘learn and share’ their participation practice.

Children have been regularly involved in Eurochild annual conferences. Members are more and more engaged in promoting the participation of children in national and EU decision making processes. Currently, Eurochild is leading a project to find out the views of vulnerable children on their rights and what solutions they propose to ensure their rights’ are respected and implemented29.

Mafalda Leal, Eurochild, Mafalda.leal@eurochild.org

29. Speak Up! www.eurochild.org/?id=454
Testimonies – personal experiences of participation

“The children’s meeting was a great experience, I really liked to meet all those fabulous people and it was great to know more about the different countries/cultures there: that’s what I enjoyed the most.

When we met with policy makers I think they really listened to us and they were very intrigued about our knowledge about this topic but, what better person to talk about children issues than with children themselves?

Children, young people should be given a lot more opportunities to talk about these issues and problems that occur a lot nowadays in Europe and around the world so everybody should be given like 15 minutes to talk about this: that would be very interesting and I think it would change the world.”

Eduardo, 13, Participant in the Child Poverty and Well-Being Conference

“Adults don’t truly know what children and young people think unless they ask and involve us. They don’t see what we see and they can learn from us.”

Morgan, 12, participant in Action for Children

“Participation gives you skills, a motivation to do other things, I learned from it and it gives us more confidence. It gives a boost for life and we are proud of what we do. Every child and young person should have the chance to be involved. It gives us skills we’ll use in life and gives us one step ahead.”

Amy, 16, participant in Action for Children
Why we are working on participation

Service users’ quality of life benefits as services increasingly take into account their wishes and as users gain ownership over the process of service delivery. Participation can thus be seen as a pre-condition of empowerment. Enabling and facilitating users to effectively participate in all decision-making processes affecting their lives brings about this ownership. Service quality also improves as a better understanding of the users’ wishes, capabilities and needs is gained and services are more tailor-made to the individual. User satisfaction increases as services focus more on this issue. Experience shows that empowerment is effective in the prevention of institutionalisation and service dependency through fostering autonomy and inspiring progress.
Eurodiaconia had been feeding into discussions on the quality of social services at EU level for a number of years and in 2009 produced a document entitled “principles of quality diaconal social services”. As well as feed into the EU level discussions, members wished to have a document that outlines what Eurodiaconia, through its member organisations, believe to be quality in diaconal social care and services and what they commit to strive for in the services they provide. The aim is to ensure that services are of the best quality possible.

Eurodiaconia is a Europe-wide community of organisations founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of Diaconia, including churches and social and health service providers. User participation and empowerment were recognised by Eurodiaconia members as essential elements in ensuring quality, tailor-made social services that support an individual’s autonomy. They felt that this topic deserved to be further developed because of its importance and complexity and therefore the toolkit was drawn up and published at the end of 2010.

The toolkit does not intend to give one definition of or describe one route to participation or empowerment of service users. Rather the document is to be seen as a flexible resource, to develop organisations’ understanding of user participation and empowerment and give a starting point for reflection and internal discussions on how to implement and improve participation and empowerment of diverse user groups.

Diaconal organisations believe that all people are made in the image of God and that each individual is unique, with resources, such as skills, ideas and competences, which can improve their quality of life and enrich the lives of those around them. A service is a tool to enable the individual persons to make use of those resources, empowering them to fulfil their potential. Empowerment of individuals is an evolving process, a journey, rather than a one off event and Eurodiaconia members also see it as a spiritual task.

The introduction outlines why participation and empowerment of service users should be pursued. It then explains why Eurodiaconia member organisations decided to produce the toolkit, as explained above. The next section presents different perspectives in defining empowerment, as a process or an outcome. It then outlines some dimensions of empowerment, such as understanding that your decisions have an impact, or believing in your competences.

The next-section contains non-prescriptive guidelines for creating an empowering environment and systems, including staff-service user relationships and the need to jointly develop a common approach to participation and empowerment in an organisation.
terms of participation it lists how service users can be involved in creating, carrying out and evaluating a service. In terms of empowerment it suggests how services can be a tool to recognise a user’s own resources and to use those resources to realise that person’s full potential. It also contains guidelines for the empowerment of staff.

The final sections contain links to online resources where organisations can find out more information on the discussions and theories. They also list a number of examples of best practice, such as methods of user participation and empowerment for different service user groups, including the homeless and persons with learning difficulties, from Eurodiaconia members and partner organisations. The complete Toolkit can be found here: www.eurodiaconia.org/files/Social_and_Health_Care_Services/SERV_25_10_Eurodiaconia_user_participation_and_empowerment_toolkit_web.pdf.

In general, Eurodiaconia members work with and advocate for groups marginalized because of health, poverty, legal status, employment situation. Our members seek to provide services that meet a wide range of complex and interdependent needs but also seek to empower the user to be their own advocate and be an active participant in the process of care. Members and partner organisations with particular experience of the participation and empowerment of users with disabilities, both physical and mental, as well as providers working with homeless service users were consulted. Specific methodologies for working with such groups are included in the toolkit.

What worked well

Eurodiaconia members have appreciated the non-prescriptive approach of the toolkit, which gives examples of best practice, and gives an overview of different approaches to participation and empowerment and suggests guidelines.

It has stimulated discussions among many Eurodiaconia members and a number of them plan to discuss the toolkit and how to further develop user participation and empowerment schemes in their services. Some members have translated the toolkit into their national language.

Challenges of this approach

It is essential that the staff is involved in the planning and implementation of user participation and empowerment schemes; a common understanding of empowerment should be developed in the organisation and the system should be based on this.

The working environment should be one in which the voice of users are heard and acted upon and the environment should encourage and build respect for users and for the staff to have a willingness to learn from users.
Development of user participation and empowerment schemes, particularly of vulnerable groups or persons with disabilities may be costly at the outset, but as previously noted, it has long-term benefits.

Lessons learned

The toolkit has helped Eurodiaconia build specific expertise based on the experiences of members, enabling the sharing of best practice within the network and from partner organisations.

Eurodiaconia was involved in the Third Forum on Social Services of General Interest and presented user participation and empowerment as key to ensuring quality social services in times of crisis. This point was picked up in the conference conclusions, giving the issue a higher profile.

Eurodiaconia will continue to promote the toolkit, encouraging members to use it to develop systems of participation and empowerment where they do not already exist or evaluate existing systems. Eurodiaconia encourages networks of diaconal organisations and individual institutions to discuss the toolkit and to give feedback to the secretariat on the text. The European Disability Forum will send it around their membership and we hope to get feedback from users through this route.

Laura Jones, Senior Policy and Membership Development Officer, Laura.jones@eurodiaconia.org
The Eskmills Project provides supported accommodation to 18 service users with learning disabilities in community based housing in Musselburgh and Portobello in Scotland. It is managed by CrossReach, a Eurodiaconia member. CrossReach is the Social Care Council of the Church of Scotland. CrossReach’s projects for people with learning disabilities run Forums for service users to discuss the services and these are featured in the Eurodiaconia toolkit.

“I am a member of the Eskmills service user forum and I enjoy going to meetings and having my say. I like to tell people how I feel and talk about things that are important... like my holidays and going out shopping. Everyone is friendly and approachable and I can speak up for myself.” RBJ

“I like going to the service user forum and travelling to Glasgow for meetings. I enjoyed being chairperson at the service user forum. I like being in charge and this has given me confidence to speak up at other meetings. I like making new friends at meetings.” HF

For more information about Eskmills please see here: [www.crossreach.org.uk/node/354](http://www.crossreach.org.uk/node/354)
Thirteen members of EAPN have shared 15 new case studies on how they are building participation of people with direct experience of poverty in organisations and in policy-making. These case studies represent a good snapshot of the different stages and levels of building participation of people living in poverty throughout Europe. While each of them looks at participation from a different perspective, common messages come through.
Commitment needed at the highest level of decision-making: Participation of people experiencing poverty is far from structurally embedded in policy making and is mostly initiated by anti-poverty organisations. Yet, all stakeholders that engage in this process become strongly convinced of the need to invest in it. Meetings of people experiencing poverty are now a practice at different levels throughout Europe. Every meeting comes up with new policy proposals and new ways of working together. While the expectations to deliver are high and the cooperation not always easy, participation is work in progress and it is crucial that decision-makers at the highest level take up these recommendations and push resiliently for more direct involvement of people living in poverty and social exclusion.

Giving meaning to participation, avoiding disappointment: Several of the case studies show that while significant efforts have been made to create spaces for direct participation of people living in poverty and social exclusion, these have not always had the expected impact on the way decision-makers and stakeholders, including NGOs, view the policy making cycle. In many situations, people with direct experience who get engaged are disillusioned with the process and sometimes disappointed with the results. They expect to see results of their engagement and this should be anticipated by those who initiate direct participation.

Emphasis on process: Preparation and follow-up are key moments to explore together the expectations that each individual and group has, when engaging in participative work. Often these two parts of the policy-making cycle do not get worthy attention for financial or other reasons. With this in mind, case studies emphasize process and trust-building. Giving enough time, training and support, evaluating the results of participation, looking at the impact on the reality, analysing together the results and planning next steps are ingredients to making participative practices deliver positive change.

Collective empowerment – valuing links between experience and policy-making: While keeping in mind that participation begins with individual engagement, the case studies in this publication show that anti-poverty organisations are developing methods of collective empowerment through regular meetings, participative structures within the organisations, adequate training and support programmes, regular spaces for dialogue with policy-makers and other actors. This collective work contributes to personal development and to diversity within the organisations. Testimonies highlight how people are breaking through fear and isolation and are looking to take initiative, to be active in groups and organisations and building on their personal experiences to developing collective analysis of the reality of people living in poverty and social exclusion. It is the kind of work that contributes to a more activist role of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion within anti-poverty organisations and in the policy-making process.

Reaching out to new groups: Children campaigning to end child poverty, public authorities consulting with older people living in poverty and social exclusion, people liv-
ing in extreme poverty changing research approaches, unemployed persons trained to provide services, talking with former drug users about social integration, conducting research with ex-offenders, involving migrants in local community work or implementing service-user participation in providing care are some of the groups and actions that the case studies describe. By constantly **doing this kind of outreach and inclusion work**, anti-poverty organisations create the basis for policy change and develop good practice that can be implemented at bigger scale. This also helps identify forms of poverty that are not being addressed by policies and groups that fall out of the system.

**Speaking to other actors – building alliances with the media:** Media has a big impact on the way society perceives poverty and people living in poverty, as well as on the way policies and welfare systems address inequality. So far media reporting on poverty has been negative and has reinforced negative stereotypes but there are examples of cooperation between anti-poverty organisations with media groups that have made a difference. **Meeting on an equal footing, discussing the portrayal of poverty and people living in poverty, organising training sessions, publishing positive stories and developing journalist guides on how to write on poverty are some examples of the work carried by anti-poverty organisations with media.** There are still many groups to reach out to, including entrepreneurs and private sector, foundations, arts and culture organisations as well as educational and academic institutions. Working with the media, campaigning and building alliances with other actors will contribute to a better understanding of poverty and more engagement.

**Diversity brings creativity – developing tools.** All the case studies published in this book have developed a wealth of new, usable and adaptable tools. Some have translated into guidelines for policy makers, others – toolkits for advocacy or service delivery. **Participation brings about a rich and positive diversity of approaches.** Despite all challenges, anti-poverty organisations engage in participative work because it has positive change on individual persons, on organisations, policies and ultimately they lead to more democratic and more inclusive society.

While organisations continue to carry the torch, commitment and support of decision-makers at the highest levels is crucial for this transformation of social policies to continue in a way that creates more equal societies and that leads to a better life for everyone.

Tanya Basarab, EAPN
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If you would like to read more on the participation work by the contributing organisations, or you have questions about the case studies or the tools presented in this book, the following list will be a good starting point.

- EAPN Austria’s homepage includes many resources and publications on the Network’s mediawork as well as smarmobs and other campaigning and awareness-raising actions in German: www.armutskonferenz.at.
- EAPN Ireland’s page on participation includes a study on Lessons and Learning from Outside Ireland on Building Effective Consultation and Participation as well as other useful information www.eapn.ie/eapn/participation/people-experiencing-poverty
- EAPN France’s website of the project on the OMC tools and the products developed during the project, including a book of proposals in French: www.armeedusalut.fr/nos-actions/europe/moc-europe.html.
- EAPN Poland and ATD Warsaw’s publication in Polish What we say should change our lives www.eapn.org.pl and www.atd.org.pl
- Poverty Alliance’s website on the Evidence – Participation – Change (EPIC) project, including all the results produced by the different focus groups as well as results of the two Scottish Assemblies for Tackling Poverty www.povertyalliance.org/projects_detail.asp?proj_id=1.
- Derbyshire Unemployed Worker’s Centre website www.duwc.org.uk. To read the Get Heard – participation toolkit developed by the UK Coalition Against Poverty which includes EAPN members, visit the www.expandinghorizons.co.uk/ftp/documents/NAP_Social_Inclusion.pdf
- ATD Fourth World’s website has a lot of useful resources on participation of people living in extreme poverty as well as other areas of work of this global organisation www.atd-fourthworld.org/en.html.


All EAPN publications and policy papers, including Small Steps – Big Changes and other ones on participation, as well as those referenced in the Chapter 2 are downloadable from our website www.eapn.eu.

For any questions related to this publication or our work on participation, please contact tanya.basarab@eapn.eu.
This is the second publication by the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) highlighting members’ initiatives to strengthen the direct participation of people experiencing poverty in organisations and in policy-making. Thirteen organisations present fifteen case studies of methods, projects, toolkits, meetings that lead to more diverse and inclusive organisations, participative policy-making and more democratic societies in Europe. In our aims to achieve a more social and democratic Europe, free of poverty and where everyone enjoys a good life, we strive to strengthen practice in governance and to ensure that participation empowers people in the decision-making process.

In describing the case studies, members reflected on the following set of questions:

Why do we work on participation? What was the context in which the experience has emerged? What have been the achievements and challenges? What impact this work has had on our organisation?

INFORMATION AND CONTACT

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See EAPN publications and activities on www.eapn.eu

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is an independent network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union, established in 1990. Together, the members of EAPN aim to put the fight against poverty high on the agenda of the EU and to ensure cooperation at EU level aimed at the eradication of poverty and social exclusion.

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