

POLITICAL DECLARATION GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018

Vienna, 29 Sept 2018

MAKE EUROPE POVERTY FREE

The General Assembly of the [European Anti-Poverty Network](#) met in Vienna today, just one week after the [Post-growth Conference](#) at the European Parliament and two weeks after [President Juncker's State of the Union address](#). The meeting took place at a time of rapid political and social change, with the coming European Parliamentary Elections in 2019, a year which will see a new President of a new Commission, and the appointment of a new president of the European Council. Other factors such as rising far right populism, climate change, and the UK's departure from the EU – which is symptomatic of disaffection with political institutions and the prevailing economic model – also provide significant and shifting challenges.

At this time of change, we, delegates of EAPN members from **31 national networks** and **13 European Organisations**, representing thousands of NGOs throughout Europe, believe that the eradication of poverty and social exclusion is a public good, and is beneficial for everyone in society. The fact that **118 million EU citizens** (including 21.6 million children) - meaning 23.5

% of the EU population (not counting people in other countries of Europe) - are **still living at risk of poverty or social exclusion**, represents a **failure of our political and economic systems**, which need a radical reprogramming in order to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

We know that **change is possible**, at local, national and European levels. We see important political commitments to tackling poverty, via the Europe 2020 targets, via the Sustainable Development Goals, and via the Social Pillar – although these are not visible enough at national and local levels. What we need most in 2019 is the **transformative implementation of these high-level political commitments**, to ensure meaningful changes to the lives of people experiencing poverty on the ground.

Vera Hinterdorfer, EAPN Die Armutskonferenz (EAPN Austria) activist with direct experience of poverty:

“When I first heard about the Pillar of Social Rights, I thought ‘Great, another letter of intent’. But I was wrong; if we don’t believe in it, why would anyone else? How would we be able to motivate people? Together we have the power to change things, we have to use it!”

Today, we call upon all political parties and all candidates for the European Parliamentary Elections to commit to securing a **Social and Sustainable Europe, a Europe free of Poverty**, characterised by **equal rights, opportunities and social cohesion**. This means a political commitment to **make the "EU Poverty Free"** – which should be included in all electoral programmes. This will guarantee the continuation of high-level political commitment to the eradication of poverty. **Making Europe Poverty Free** is a political choice which recognises citizens' rights, ensures access to those rights, and reflects the solidarity felt by Europeans.

Concretely, this would mean political parties and candidates to the European Parliamentary Elections:

1. Recognise the limits of the EU's development model on social cohesion and the **negative impact of 10 years of austerity, 'trickle down' economics**, and decades of **relentless pursuit of economic growth at the expense of people and the environment**.
 - a. European macroeconomic policies must be reoriented to reduce inequality, ensure a more even redistribution of resources throughout society, and guarantee wellbeing
 - b. In-work poverty must be recognised as a major challenge to society and a political commitment is needed for the creation of **quality jobs and inclusive labour markets**
 - c. The Stability and Growth Pact must be redesigned as the **Stability and Wellbeing Pact**.
2. Ensure all European countries have **strong social protection systems**, including **Decent Minimum Income schemes** and appropriate living wage legislation.
3. Ensure that the **next EU budget 'empowers and protects' the 25% of Europeans living at risk of poverty and social exclusion**.
4. Ensure **meaningful space for the participation of civil society and of people experiencing poverty** in national and European processes which impact on poverty and social exclusion.
5. Respect **human rights and equal opportunities legislation** in all electoral programmes and future actions, as required by European and international treaties.
6. Recognise that **European economic development must not sustain, generate or promote conflicts, poverty and pollution elsewhere**.

Sérgio Aires, EAPN President, said:

"We are committed to being the change that we need. We know that to truly eradicate poverty, we need a stronger anti-poverty movement in Europe, and throughout the world. Today, we reaffirm our commitment to strengthening the anti-poverty movement, reinforcing our collective beliefs and working to truly become a social movement of, with and for people experiencing poverty. We invite all anti-poverty organisations and activists to [join our movement!](#) Together, we are stronger."

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