

Annual report of the Hungarian Anti-Poverty Network

2009

The mission of the Hungarian Anti Poverty Network:

The fundamental aim of the Hungarian Anti Poverty Network is to contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion in Hungary via activities of community building and interest representation, of mutual data collection and provision, taking place with the active participation of the people experiencing poverty and strengthening self-help, influencing the public and increasing social awareness in order to facilitate the creation of laws, strategies, local, regional, national and international actions and programmes that take into account the opinions, suggestions and interests of those living in poverty and excluded from society and strengthen social cohesion, as well as to give publicity to the fight against poverty.

The vision of the **Hungarian Anti poverty Network** is to establish a non-governmental cooperation of interest representation, which:

- covers the entire country and connects the majority of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and initiatives representing the interests of people experiencing poverty,
- is fundamentally based on the cooperation between those experiencing poverty and experts working for the reduction of poverty,
- continuously and effectively participates in national and regional processes of the reconciliation of interests,
- represents standpoints and opinions that are professionally founded and formed by the active participation of the interested parties,
- applies effectively the tools ensuring communication and publicity; issues represented by the Network are continuously in the public thinking.

Priorities of the Network for 2009 and related activities:

1. *Extending the Network* by involving more NGOs that work to reduce poverty and facilitating the establishment of the organisations of people experiencing poverty.

As a result of our efforts to involve NGOs, the Network's membership exceeded one hundred in 2009. The following activities contributed to recruiting new members:

- a) Regional fora held regularly during the year. Apart from member organisations, NGOs dealing with the issue of poverty and social exclusion in the particular regions were also invited to attend. In the course of 2009, we held 11 regional fora with some 250-300 participants. The dates and places of these were as follows: 27th March, Veszprém; 8th April, Nyíregyháza; 10th April, Dombóvár; 14th April, Győr; 17th April, Szeged; 30th April, Budapest; 27th May, Székesfehérvár; 20th June, Eger; 17th November, Győr; 25th November, Budapest and 27th November, Debrecen.
- b) being present and actively participating in events and conferences organised by NGOs and other actors, giving information on the activities of the Network and on possibilities for joining us. The Network took part in the programme of Civil Sziget,

- the Social Expo, the Community Developers' Summer University and several other conferences and events of various sizes.
- c) the research conducted in summer 2009 with the aim of exploring the current situation of civil interest representation – where we asked several thousand organisations to complete our online questionnaire – was aimed at, among others, establishing contacts with NGOs dealing with poverty.
 - d) in order to provide information on the Network and facilitate contacts, we have expanded the reach of our publications throughout the year (e.g. Vágóképek – rögzítve 2008.), regularly updated our website and prepared the new guide to the Network.

Support for the self-organisation of people actively participating in or related to the Network by experiencing poverty continued primarily within the framework of the training programme “Speak up!” and the working group of those who had formerly completed this programme. The Network did not receive specific requests to support the establishment of new organisations during the year and is not aware of any such organisation set up.

2. *Strengthening and consolidating the Network*

The two questions presenting the most difficulties in terms of organisational issues are the mobilisation and involvement of member organisations and creating a sound financial background. No significant progress has been made in these two areas during the year. The activity of members and promoting joint activities are also a top priority in the three-year organisational strategy prepared in 2009 and adopted in 2010.

The following activities contributed to strengthening the Network:

- a) developing an organisational development plan in the spring of 2009 with the participation of members of the Coordinating Body, lead by a third-party expert. Implementation of the objectives and tasks set out in the plan started during the year.
- b) the Coordinating Body (CB) met regularly in order to ensure the sound functioning of the Network. The dates of the meetings were: Meetings of the CB: 2009. 7th January, 18th February, 16-17th March, 15th April, 9th June, 30th September – 1st October and 18th December.
- c) four seminars on capacity development were held in 2009 for members of the CB, focusing on organisational development, European affairs, human rights knowledge and cooperation and communication, respectively.
- d) thanks to some tendering support, we were able to provide “experience” of the CB with mobile phones and mobile internet access, thereby helping them participate in a substantive manner in information transfer and liaising.
- e) regional fora mentioned above also facilitated communication within the Network, getting to know each other and initiating joint activities. The number of members taking part in these fora varied. In 2009 we started organising so-called “migrant” fora, which means that we are trying to appear in different municipalities within each region in the hope that this makes it easier for people living nearby to attend.

- f) the ad-hoc nature of communication within the organisation could not be significantly improved. The assessment of communication by member organisations varies (we have greatly satisfied and also profoundly dissatisfied members), it has, however, become clear that there is a need within the Network for a newsletter appearing regularly and providing current information in a systematic manner. That said, – based on our feedbacks – we can conclude that information disseminated through the Network's mailing list (tendering opportunities, events, searching for partners) have proved useful for many. Though not yet to the required extent, the mailing list could provide a platform for the organisations to discuss current issues.
- g) in order to give the Network a uniform identity, we had a new image designed in 2009 which ensured an easy recognition of the Network's communication interfaces in our correspondence and our publications alike.
- h) in order to improve the human resources background of the Network, we have managed to hire a new colleague, involve subcontractors for several specialised tasks and increase the number of volunteers capable of contributing to the Network's activities.
- i) as we have mentioned in the introduction, we have not been able to achieve the solid funding of the Network. Although resources enabling operation and the organisation of professional programmes were available in 2009, we continue to depend on ongoing tendering opportunities and are thus unable to plan for longer than 6 months or a year in advance.

3. Promoting the social inclusion of people experiencing poverty and organising their participation within the Network

Since its foundation, one of the highest priorities of the Network and the basic principle of its operation has been to ensure and promote the involvement of people experiencing poverty. This was the reason behind restructuring the Coordinating Body some years ago and providing an opportunity for individuals who live in poverty to join. In the years since then, and as such, in 2009 we have paid particular attention to carry out all activities and formulate all opinions of the Network with the involvement of those experiencing poverty.

The following activities contributed to attaining the above goals in 2009:

- a) launching the training programme "Speak up!" with approximately 15 participants. The present curriculum of the "Speak up!" programme was developed as an improvement of the training related to the preparation and selection of the Hungarian group attending the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty. The programme still aims at preparing people for the Brussels meeting, but just as much attention is devoted to participation in other activities of the Network, to empowerment, skills development and the discussion of topics and issues related to poverty (a video on the training programme that started in autumn 2009 is available on our website: www.mszeh.hu).
- b) operation of the "Speak up!" working group. Drawing from experiences of the past years it has become clear that people attending the different training

programmes would like to stay in touch after the courses end and that there is a need to provide a framework for their participation in the Network. Furthermore, it was also necessary to have a relatively permanent group to coordinate the methodological and professional work related to this participation. The working group has been active throughout the year joining in on in all the activities of the Network. It played a significant role in preparing and conducting our awareness raising event on 17th October (<http://picasaweb.google.hu/hapnlista/2009Oktober17UtcaiAkcio#>), as well as our participation at the Social Expo and at „Sziget” (<http://picasaweb.google.hu/hapnlista>). In 2009 we were able to start developing the content and framework of a training programme to promote the participation in society of people experiencing poverty, which can be shared with and used to advantage by other organisations (primarily our members).

- c) At the 8th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty held in Brussels on 15-16th May 2009 Hungary was represented by Mrs. József Reiber (Magdi), Andrea Simon, Éva Szarvák and Gábor Ódor. A video of the Meeting is available on our website.
- d) We actively contributed to the methodological work within the European Anti poverty Network aimed at facilitating participation. Within this framework, Mrs. Zoltán Szvoboda (Irén) and Izabella Márton attended the EAPN seminar on 3-4th April 2009, representing Hungary. At the seminar, different national networks exchanged their experience regarding methods to promote participation and were reflecting together on how national networks as well as the EAPN could enhance the effective participation in society of people living in poverty. The book “Small Steps, Big Changes” was presented there, a chapter of which gives an analysis of how the Hungarian Network's Coordinating Body operates.
- e) Another component in the context of participation and cooperation is our FAIR (Independent Debt Prevention and Debt Management Information System) training and the follow-up counselling work. Two people (one whose familiarity with financial difficulties and poverty comes primarily from their studies or job, and another with real-life experience) from seven municipalities participated in the programme and the goal was to put into practice the so-called “tandem model” (expert and party concerned working together). As part of the project, FAIR counsellors provided information, gave individual counselling and initiated community activities in their own municipalities. The projects at the different locations were of varied effectiveness, though the fact that the method has since then been used in other projects is definitely a sign of success.
- f) The Network participates as a partner in the programme of the Budapest Social Resource Centre whose aim is to train so-called experience experts. In 2009, a total of 45 people have started preparations for their training in three training groups (in Budapest, Veszprém and Nyíregyháza) under the project.

4. *Effective interest representation, professional work and awareness raising to reduce poverty and social exclusion*

The economic, social and political atmosphere and priorities of 2009 were to a great extent determined by the culmination of the financial crisis, as well as the government's intervention and crisis management programme aimed at containing the crisis. The measures introduced include cancelling the so-called "szocpol" (social-political aid), the provision of maternity benefits (GYES) for a maximum of 2 years and the practical implementation of the "one family one RÁT (capacity support)" principle. While government discourse was about curbing social expenditure and introducing austerity measures to restore competitiveness, the "guerrilla" type messages and actions of local and national politicians had recurrent elements punishing the poor. One example is the social card as a local but fast-spreading initiative.

In this context, the Network carried out the following interest representative activities:

- a) *Participation in the preparation of the 2010 European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion*
 - the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (SZMM) proposed the establishment of a National Consultation Body comprising of an equal number of non-governmental and government delegates to foster extensive information and discussions about the Year. The non-governmental members of the Body were proposed by the Network (based on applications for an open invitation). The Body started its operation in spring 2009, gave an opinion on the programme of the Year and monitored the preparatory process.
 - The Network had been working on the proposal for the programme of the Year since summer 2008; the content of the programme (objectives, messages, target groups) adopted in spring 2009 by the National Consultation Body and approved in May by the European Commission fundamentally complied with the Network's suggestions.
 - The cooperation with SZMM and the working group responsible for implementation, as well as the pressure the Network exerted were instrumental in the fact that the majority of the Year's resources can now be allocated to programmes to be carried out by the NGOs.

- b) *Monitoring the effects of budgetary cuts, the economic crisis and government measures on families and individuals experiencing poverty and related awareness-raising:*
 - on 23-24th April 2009, the Network organised a seminar entitled "The Interests of the Poor in the Economic Crisis" with participants from Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland. (A report on the seminar can be downloaded here:
http://halozatesreszvetel.msze.hu/download/tamop_nemz_szem_beszamolok_050519.doc).

- in 2009, just like in previous years, we compiled the next report of the “Vágóképek – rögzítve” series. A highlight of the report was the experiences and perceived problems related to the effects of the crisis. The report was presented at a press conference on 18th March 2009, then sent to all MPs and presented to the media, NGOs and interested experts at different locations within the country. (The report can be downloaded here: <http://www.hapn.hu/?pid=195>).
 - the following positions and open letters were published by the Network and communicated to the media during the year:
 - It is our common responsibility not to allow a social crisis to follow the financial and economic crisis! – an appeal against cutting social expenses and especially the restructuring of the family benefit system – 1st February 2009.
 - Position of the Hungarian Anti poverty Network on the budget proposal aimed at introducing the “one family, one provision” system – 9th October 2009.
 - Statement of the Hungarian Anti poverty Network on the International Day of Fight Against Poverty – 17th October 2009. The statement was presented to the media within the framework of our awareness raising event at Liszt Ferenc square.
 - We participated in two meetings of the Parliament’s Committee on Youth, Social and Family Affairs and we commented on a private member's motion concerning the introduction of the social card.
- c) the Network took part in the following consultation and discussion forums:
- Let Children Have a Better Life Evaluation Committee – the annual report of the Committee can be downloaded here: http://www.kim.gov.hu/misc/letoltheto/gyerekeselyek_2009.pdf
 - Crisis Fund Counselling Body
- d) in summer 2009 we conducted a research to better acquaint ourselves with the interest representative work and positive and negative experiences of our member organisations and other NGOs dealing with poverty, as well as to explore possible directions for improvement. Based on the information collected from the 450 questionnaires completed and 20 interviews, we prepared the concluding study of the research entitled “Are We Speaking Up?” The findings of the research have a significant influence on the developmental directions and strategic priorities of the Network.
- e) the Network continued to participate in the work of the European Anti poverty Network in 2009 to promote the national representation of EU issues and the European representation of national issues, the exchange of experience and effective joint action. Priority areas of participation were the management of EAPN, the social cohesion working group, the sustainable funding working group and the General Assembly. In the latter, the Network was represented by a group of six in June 2009. Our active international presence meant that the Network

received several requests to give lectures. One worth mentioning was the seminar of EAPN on Participation where Mrs. Zoltán Szvoboda gave a presentation.

In connection with the 2009 European Parliamentary elections, we got in touch with the candidates within the framework of EAPN's lobbying activities. The most important demands regarding the next European Parliament were promoting social cohesion and making the closing of the gap as regards poverty and inequalities an absolute priority of the European Union.

In 2009 we used funding to prepare the Hungarian version of the EAPN Structural Funds Manual.

- f) having assessed the increasing problem of financial exclusion and indebtedness, the Network launched a programme at the beginning of 2009 to disseminate financial and economic knowledge, to prevent indebtedness and to establish a cooperation with banks. In addition to the training and counselling mentioned above, we established contacts with the Training Centre for Bankers and we held discussions with representatives of the Banking Association.

- g) during the year we formed a cooperation with environmental organisations on different platforms and joined several of their campaigns related to the issue of poverty and social exclusion. Thus we attended the negotiation held in May regarding the Climate Law, the roundtable discussion of the Energy Club in October, we cooperated with the Greens – discussions on the Climate Law (22nd May 2009) and participation in the campaign –, as well as joined CEEWeb's project as a partner, which is aimed at approaching social and environmental aspects and exploring common platforms and interests. Recognising the importance of themes addressed in the discussions, at the end of 2009 the Network decided to set up a working group dealing with sustainable development.

- h) Upon external request, the Network contributed to the assessment of different tenders as an expert. We took part in awarding the Journalist Award Against Discrimination offered by the European Commission and in selecting the NGOs to organise children's groups who would be invited to T-Com Gyereksziget.

5. Report on funding received in 2009

Funding	Funding received (HUF)	Funding used (HUF)	Funding to be used later (HUF)
NCA-ORSZ-08-1051 operational tender 01. 06. 2008 – 31. 05. 2009	1 654 978,00	1 316 254,00	338 724,00
NCA-ÖNSZ-08-A-0201 Network development, organising regional fora,	742 878,00	742 878,00	0,00

liaising			
NCA-NK-08-B-P-0302 Study visit to Belgium	238 854,00	238 854,00	0,00
NCA-NK-08-D-P-0041 translation and preparation of EAPN documents, international contacts	994 500,00	994 500,00	0,00
NCA-ORSZ-09-1176 operational tender 01. 06. 2009 – 31. 05. 2010	4 500 000,00	2 308 190,00	2 191 810,00
NCA-CIV-09-C-0165 Strategic planning, questionnaires, focus groups, str. planning workshop	2 224 000,00	200 000,00	2 024 000,00
EAPN 2009 National preparation of the 8 th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty	1 214 167,00	1 869 596,00	-655 429,00
EAPN journeys	1 608 501,00	1 834 145,00	-225 644,00
TÁMOP.2.5.1-07/1-2008-0129 Network development, regional fora, training, website, research, “Vágóképek – rögzítve”	16 861 810,00	10 440 346,00	6 421 464,00
SZMM Completing the 2010 calendar	2 200 000,00	2 200 000,00	0,00
LEVI STRAUSS Foundation Implementation of FAIR, cooperation with financial institutions	9 109 723,00	7 364 599,00	1 745 124,00
Norwegian Fund Training experience experts	3 939 009,00	1 009 850,00	2 929 159,00
		30 519 212,00	14 769 208,00

Budapest, 23rd August 2010