





Éire 2004 Uachtaránacht an Aontais Eorpaigh
Ireland 2004 Presidency of the European Union

3rd EUROPEAN MEETING OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

Participation is a two way street

A Conference of the Irish Presidency of the EU

May 28th – 29th, 2004 • Palais d’Egmont, Brussels







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Foreword by Irish Presidency

One of the major challenges undertaken by Member States at the European Council in Lisbon in 2000 was “to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty” by 2010. The overall long term aim is not just to reduce poverty, but to eradicate it. A decisive impact on achieving this aim is to be made by 2010. This cannot merely involve improving State provision for those in poverty and social exclusion, but taking more fundamental action that will tackle the causes of the poverty and social exclusion which continue to exist in Europe, and making a determined effort to remove them.

Member States, through the open method of co-ordination, are making a concerted effort to meet these challenges through their national action plans against poverty and social exclusion. It is recognised in this process that the eradication of poverty involves not just a Governmental response and commitment, but a societal response, including all the key stakeholders, resulting in the requirement to have consultation.

Clearly people experiencing poverty are key stakeholders in this regard. It is they who experience and suffer from the effects of poverty, and from that experience gain key insights into the causes of poverty, on how best to eradicate it, and on what the priorities should be.

For those reasons the Irish Presidency has been pleased to advance consultation at EU level with this key stakeholder through hosting the 3rd meeting of people experiencing poverty on 28 and 29 May 2004, with the support of the European Commission and the Belgian Government and with the assistance of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).

I wish to thank all involved for their great support in organising the meeting and especially all the participants who worked so hard to make it such a success. I wish to extend a special word of thanks to the participants of the new Member States, as this was the first such meeting of the Enlarged Union. They brought a new dimension to the discussions and clearly will strengthen the determination to ensure eradicating poverty remains a key priority for the EU.

The theme of the Meeting - Participation is a two way street - focussed on the importance of Governments at national and EU levels actively engaging with people experiencing poverty on their situations, with a view to taking full account of their concerns and proposals in policy development. The text of the message of the Irish Presidency to the Council of Ministers on 1 – 2 June, 2004, which reflects the outcome of the discussions on this theme, is reproduced in this report.

The report generally provides an excellent account of the Conference proceedings and it is our hope that it will be available widely to people experiencing poverty, those who work with them, Governments and all other key stakeholders throughout the European Union.

I very much welcome the undertaking given by Ms Marie-Jose JACOBS, Minister for Family Affairs, Social Solidarity and Youth, Luxembourg that the Luxembourg Presidency will host the meeting next year. This should help to ensure its continuance as an important annual event in combating poverty and social exclusion.

MARY COUGHLAN TD

Minister for Social and Family Affairs

Note: Since this meeting Minister Coughlan has been assigned other ministerial responsibilities. The current minister for Social and Family Affairs is, Mr Seamus Brennan TD.

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Part 1

Introduction

Background

The Lisbon European Council (2000) agreed to put in place an EU strategy aimed at making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty in the European Union countries by the year 2010. The Nice European Council (December 2000) agreed common objectives for this strategy. One of the agreed objectives is to mobilize all actors – including people, who experience poverty – to engage with the elements of the strategy.

In response to this the Belgian Presidency (2001) organised a European meeting of people who live facing poverty and exclusion. This was followed in 2003 by a similar initiative under the Greek Presidency of the European Union. These meetings confirmed the importance of the participation of people experiencing poverty in the process and demonstrated that such participation improves the standards of the decision-making and implementation processes. As a follow up to this process, the Irish Presidency (2004) organised this third European meeting of people experiencing poverty in the EU countries with the support of the European Commission and the Belgian Government. The European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) has played a role in providing technical assistance and logistical support for the organisation of these meetings.

This third European meeting of people experiencing poverty takes place just after the official enlargement of the EU. The Irish Presidency was delighted to welcome at this meeting, for the first time, delegations coming from the new member states of the European Union. This development offered an important opportunity to develop new relationships and to include new insights and approaches to the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The report from the Greek Presidency on the Second European Meeting of People experiencing poverty and exclusion, to the June 2003 Employment and Social Affairs Council included the proposal that: *“The Member States intensify their efforts to foster participation at all levels of people experiencing poverty and develop structural Networks”*. The Aim of the Third Meeting was:

“To develop further ways of promoting the participation at all levels of people experiencing poverty and exclusion and to strengthen or develop the structural networks to facilitate this involvement.”

To support this aim, the Irish Presidency, with the co-operation of the Social Exclusion Programme Committee and EAPN, decided to carry out a survey to seek information on the extent of support for such structural networks. The survey sought information on mechanisms, which engage the participation of people experiencing poverty and information on whether this has been useful in drawing up the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion that are central to the EU Inclusion Strategy. Members of the European Commission Social Exclusion Programme Committee and the European Anti-Poverty Network collated responses at a national level. The results of this survey are contained in part 3 of this report.

Prior to the Third Meeting, delegations coming from the different countries had opportunity to meet to prepare their input for the third meeting. This provided the opportunity to develop questions and issues arising from their local and national experience. These questions coming from the experience and analysis of people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion stimulated a high level of dialogue within the third meeting.

The majority of the participants at the conference were people who face the reality of poverty and exclusion and who have begun to work with others in an attempt to improve their situation and that of their families and communities. Other participants included representatives of anti poverty NGOs and front line social workers. There was also a strong presence of representatives of EU Institutions and members of the Social Protection committee and the Social Exclusion Programme Committee.

The European meeting of people experiencing poverty and exclusion is not a substitute for the

work of the many organisations and networks that exist to defend the interests of people experiencing poverty and exclusion. It is rather recognition at the level of the Presidency of the EU of the importance of the ‘voice’ of people experi-

encing poverty and exclusion and an illustration of the importance of their engagement with structured networks that facilitate their involvement in society.

Chairman’s Reflections

The three European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty have brought European citizens who are at the very bottom to the very top, from the very margins to the very centre, from high-rise apartments, and encampments, and hostels, and back-streets, and forgotten villages and lonely places to a palace, the Palais d’Egmont, where European statesmen meet. They represent, potentially, a revolutionary process. The third meeting, in May 2004, demonstrated progress from the two previous ones but also showed how much more could yet be achieved.

What did I expect in advance? I had reflected on the long history of poverty as a political issue throughout Europe: the Poor Law systems; the poverty surveys and investigations in the late nineteenth century; the growth of the welfare state in the middle of the last century; later the discovery of the failures of welfare states, the rediscovery of poverty, in the 1960s, in the early years of European integration. The Treaty of Rome, with which European integration began, did not mention poverty, or social exclusion, but the economic downturn and the “crisis of the welfare state” in the 1970s, probably made it inevitable that the EU would have to acknowledge the issue and do something about it.

By the 1970s poverty had come on the national agenda in only a few countries. Since then it has come on the national agenda of the majority of countries, and over the years poverty, or social exclusion, has become an item of ever growing importance on the European agenda. This is due to the initiative and persistence of key figures at the centre of the EU project. For countries in the EU, and maybe for other countries as well, the EU institutions played an important role in having poverty discussed and in having action taken, and thereby making constant, though slow, progress.

The three European “poverty programmes” were the beginning. In the spirit of the times the first and second European Poverty Programmes, in the 1970s and 1980s, seemed to put the onus for improvement, to a considerable extent, on local actions and on poor people themselves. The problem was seen as a lack of co-ordination (of national and local policies and services); the solution was mobilisation at the local level, including participation by the poor; the cost was modest grants. Later in the 1980s the discovery of “new poverty”, a threat to the more vulnerable in the comfortable majority, and the realisation that there was a social downside to the completion of the Single Market and industrial re-organisation, changed minds. The year 1989 was a watershed for politics in central and eastern Europe: for a historic moment ‘people power’ won out over state control. That year was also a watershed for social policy in the EU. ‘Social exclusion’ was the new term, and the spotlight swung to national policies and their failure to prevent social exclusion. In Poverty III, the third EU programme, the ideal of participation of the poor was retained but the emphasis shifted to the role of state agencies at the regional and local levels and on how they could and should, in association with the social partners, take co-ordinated and effective action to combat social exclusion. The focus was now on the states.

Following Poverty III there was a hiatus: the competence of the EU in addressing poverty was challenged. This problem was solved when the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 formally allowed that the European Council could encourage co-operation between member states in relation to “social exclusion”. This opened the way for the adoption at the Lisbon Council in 2000 of the goal of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and achieving greater social cohesion, and for the Nice Council, later that year, to decide on a new policy initiative (NAPs/inclusion) to provide incentives to all member states to adopt a proactive, planned and comprehensive

policy approach to tackling social inclusion.. The following year, 2001, marked the beginning of that EU-wide process. In that same year the first European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty took place.

Over thirty years, then, “people experiencing poverty” in European countries have moved from being the objects of, and participants in, locally based poverty projects to being the subjects, and equal participants, in EU-level conferences on national and European policy in respect of poverty.

It was an honour for me to chair the third European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty. It was an honour to work, before, during and after the meeting, with the Irish Presidency and with the stalwarts of the EAPN-led organising committee who took great pains to organise everything to the best advantage of the participants. It was an honour to meet the ministers of Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg and the Commission’s officials who showed their personal commitment to consultation and dialogue on poverty at the European level. It was a special honour to meet the participants. They shared with one another and with the organisers and special guests their experiences and their anxieties, what they have suffered and what they have learned, and what they can teach and what the rest of us can learn from them about poverty and about what can and should be done about it.

For me there were three main themes in this meeting, representing in each case achievements already gained and promises yet to be fulfilled; they correspond to three levels of action:

1) the validation of the experiences and views of people experiencing poverty themselves:

Personal Experience of Poverty: Even the best intentioned and best informed policy makers cannot hope to develop policies, programmes and practices to combat poverty and social exclusion if they do not know what it is like to be poor: the only people who can tell them are the poor themselves. These European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty show that it can be done. At this last meeting we heard vivid accounts of many aspects of poverty as it is experienced today. There are always new issues. Among those mentioned were the implications of open markets, and less sensitive authorities, in public utilities such as

water and electricity. Lack of access to Information Technology is a new form of poverty for children. We also heard about the kidnapping and exploitation of young people across borders, a new and vicious European market in people. And there were many “good news” stories, initiatives poor people themselves and their associates are taking that respect their rights and choices.

2) the formal arrangements for participation by poor people in policy-making at the national level:

Consultation at National Level: The excellent survey included in this report, shows that there are a great variety of mechanisms for promoting the participation of ‘poor’ people in policy making at the national level. The government ministers present were able to report on initiatives in their own countries designed to enable the state to hear the voices from the bottom. The messages coming up can inform national planning and can, in turn, be brought forward for discussion and action to be taken at European Council meetings. The terminology and the consultative systems vary from country to country. In Ireland and in Belgium there are “partnership agreements” in which organisations for and of the poor take their place with the original “social partners”; in Luxembourg the NGOs have won the right to join the *Conceil Superieur*; in France, there is since 1998 a *Conseil National de Lutte contre les Exclusions* and this year a communication to the general public on the struggle against exclusion was included in the French National Action Plan; in Denmark there is a “Council for Vulnerable Groups”. Many more countries could emulate these initiatives.

However for participants in the meeting all such consultative systems are problematic. Sometimes consumer consultation serves the needs of the better off but not the poor; even consultation about social protection may result in improvements for stronger interests and not for the worst off. To what extent can individual poor people get heard as distinct from poverty organisations? And how much tolerance is there of campaigners and “trouble makers”, even when they have a just cause?

Whatever else the national mechanisms of communication and consultation and the linkages

with national governments, provide the means of connecting people experiencing poverty to the European policy-making systems. The governments are the main actors on the European stage.

3) the need for further action at the EU level:

Action by the EU: As I have suggested above, the role of the EU institutions, or at least those concerned with social issues, has been creditable and progressive as far as poverty is concerned, and has influenced developments at the national level. European initiatives on social exclusion are allowed by the existing treaties, and are envisaged in the draft European constitution. The “open method of co-ordination” as operated in relation to National Action Plans on Inclusion is already beginning to pay dividends for poor people throughout Europe. However – and this is a very big however – the main concerns of the EU are economic concerns and as things stand social concerns are in second place. This is why, not only are the poor disadvantaged, but social ministers, both at the national level and at the European level, operate at a disadvantage too. Despite the

tensions between politics and social movements, the politicians and the campaigners have to co-exist. This is why it is in the interests of the poor that members of government who are concerned with poverty need to be strengthened in contending with other ministers with other concerns. That is what makes social reform such a complicated business: the reformers in politics are caught in the middle. The ministers at our meeting promised to take the messages from the meeting to the European Council and to press for further change within their own governments and also in the Council.

We must hope that the more traffic there is on this “two-way street” of policy consultation and discussion on poverty the more those seeming to go in opposite directions can make common cause. If that is to happen we must look forward to further European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty.

Séamus Ó Cinnéide
Jean Monnet Professor of European Social Policy
National University of Ireland Maynooth

Message form the Irish Presidency to the Council of Ministers. June 2004

The Irish Presidency, with the support of the European Commission, and in co-operation with the Belgian Government and the European Anti Poverty Network, organised the 3rd European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, which took place in Brussels on 28 and 29 May 2004. The following key messages emerged from the meeting:

Effective participation by people experiencing poverty is taking place and developing in the context of the efforts by Member States to achieve the Lisbon goals of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and achieving greater social cohesion. There are many examples of good practice in this regard across Member States.

The priority now is to further widen and deepen the process:

1. Implementation and further development of the National Action Plans on social inclusion (NAPs/inclusion) is a pivotal part of the process. These plans have been very effective in

keeping the issue of eradicating poverty at the top of the political agenda at both national and EU levels and have given a real impetus to participation by all stakeholders. People experiencing poverty are key stakeholders and should be involved in the process.

2. Participation, to be effective, needs to be well organised and well resourced. It represents a key social investment through the contribution it makes to achieving the goals of the NAPs/inclusion and greater social cohesion more generally.

3. Participation is a two way street. Reciprocation by Government is essential, requiring openness and effective action to progressively meet the challenges identified. This should involve participation in monitoring and evaluating implementation of the Plans, including the use of indicators to measure progress at national level and make comparisons with other Member States. The exchange of information, experience and best

practice between the 25 Member States is a key element of Open Co-ordination, not just for Governments but for all stakeholders, especially for those experiencing poverty. They need to know what is possible in eradicating poverty, by knowing what other Member States can achieve, having regard to economic and other circumstances. Care should be taken in the proposed streamlining not to reduce, but to enhance, the effectiveness of such policy exchanges.

4. The causes of poverty are complex and varied. The voices and concerns of all the diverse groups who experience poverty need to be heard. Groups identified at the Conference as needing special support included immigrants and ethnic minorities, victims of trafficking, particularly children, those living in sub-standard accommodation, the homeless, people living with disabilities and lone parents.
5. The multi-faceted nature of poverty requires responses from a number of other Ministers, including those with responsibility for health, education, housing, justice and home affairs, and finance.
6. A major source of poverty for many is discrimination. People experiencing poverty are well placed to identify sources of discrimination and ways to end it. Their participation in measures to combat discrimination should be promoted and encouraged.

The Irish Presidency noted the views expressed that:

- The Member States
Should build on and deepen the participation at all levels of people experiencing poverty, in partnership with all the other stakeholders, in working to meet the challenge of making a decisive impact on eradicating poverty and on achieving greater social cohesion.
- The Member States and the Commission
Should ensure that people experiencing poverty are given a meaningful involvement in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the NAPs/inclusion and in the preparation of future plans, and that the need to effectively facilitate this participation is fully taken into account in the streamlining of the process of Open-co-ordination, especially as it applies to the NAPs/inclusion.
- The European Commission
Should ensure that the interests of those experiencing poverty are fully taken into account in the debate on the future of the Structural Funds and in the review of the Social Policy Agenda.

The Irish Presidency welcomes the commitment of Luxembourg, given at the Meeting, to make provision for this type of meeting in Brussels during its Presidency in 2005, and reiterates the proposal of the Greek Presidency to the Council of Ministers in 2003 that the European Commission and successive EU Presidencies make provision for the organisation of these meetings as part of the annual work programme (like the Annual Round Table).

Part 2

Report of Conference

Opening Plenary

CHAIRMAN:

Professor. Seamus O' Cinneide, *University of Maynooth, Ireland*

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Mr Gerry Mangan, *Representative of Irish Presidency*

Minister Marie Arena, *Ministre de l'Intégration Sociale, Politique des Grandes villes, Egalité des Chances et Fonction Publique, Belgium*

Madame Marie-Josée Jacobs, *Minister for Family Affairs, Social Solidarity and Youth, Luxembourg*

Madame Odile Quintin, *Director General for Employment and Social Affairs, European Commission*

Madame Isabelle Leborgne, *Association Action Partenariat International Economique et Social, Participant of the second meeting*

The Chairman, **Professor Seamus O' Cinneide**, opened the Third Meeting on behalf of the Irish Presidency. He reminded the gathering of the long history of anti-poverty work in Europe,

"Given the dominance of economic concerns in the global market, it is easy to be cynical about a Social Europe, but for 30 years Europe has also drawn attention to poverty and has ensured that there is some action to redress that poverty throughout Europe."

He welcomed the keynote speakers and all participants with the encouragement to enter into open dialogue and fruitful exchanges in the days that followed.

Mr Gerry Mangan, **Representative of the Irish Presidency** welcomed participants on behalf of **Minister Mary Coughlan, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs**, who asked him to convey her best wishes for the meeting; her anticipation of participating in the meeting later, especially for the concluding discussions, and her commitment to the goal of making a decisive impact to eradicate poverty by 2010, as set by the European Council. Since 1st May 2004, this goal is shared with 10 new Member States and Mr Mangan extended a special welcome to represen-

tatives from new Member States. He went on to say on behalf of Minister Mary Coughlan, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs, that:

"The National Action Plans for Social Inclusion which we are currently implementing show the complexity of the task of eradicating poverty which has no single cause or solution and requires a committed response not just from Governments but from society as a whole. My experience of developing NAPs/incl in Ireland has brought home how many different groups are required to develop and implement plans. These include academics and experts to analyse causes and possible solutions, Social Partners, as in employers and Trades Unions, and the support of Civil Society. The support of non-governmental organisations, which work with people who experience poverty, is particularly important as they have a special understanding of the issues. EAPN is a good representative of these groups. The leadership of Government is also required, especially the Ministries of Social Affairs, accompanied by international solidarity and support through the European Union and the European Commission. Above all, we need the engagement of people who experience poverty, who know what it's like to be poor; who know the causes of the poverty that they experience and know the types of solutions that will eradicate poverty and enable them to have the quality of life that the rest of us take for granted. That is why this meeting is such a vital part of the commitment to the process. We are particularly indebted to Belgium for their ongoing commitment and support to this process. The Irish Presidency is pleased to be in a position to ensure that the process continues. If we are really to eradicate poverty, we need to listen to the people who experience poverty. Minister Mary Coughlan is keen to report to her Ministerial colleagues on the outcome of the meeting and hopes for a clear, strong message to convey to them".

Minister Marie Arena identified the Third Meeting as important to the process of participation, which needs to be sustainable and sensitive to needs and aspirations.

“This Third Meeting is a signal of the need for an annual event. Poverty is still there in many different forms as is clear from the statistics. There is poverty in monetary terms but also in access to education and new forms of technology”.

There are a certain number of actions, which have been realised through the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion, and they need to be reinforced. A Social Europe is not an abstract concept; it is a struggle on a number of different levels that should be made visible. To make this work visible, it is necessary to demonstrate how a social Europe functions and we need to speak out. There must be communication, which stays in touch with the grassroots. We have to make sure that in the Social Europe, will cater for basic needs with sound social security systems, which secure a place in society for everyone.

When we have difficulty meeting the Lisbon goals, there are those who say we should abandon the struggle. I say we must renew and reinforce our efforts. We must do more than help people out of poverty; we must make sure that people do not fall into poverty. Links with other Ministries at a National level such as the links with the Ministry for Equal Opportunities in Belgium are also an important element of success.”

Minister Marie Arena congratulated the organisers on the open spirit of dialogue of this Third Meeting and looked forward to hearing the messages for the Council meeting. She emphasised the important role of all participants in taking these messages back to each of the countries represented.

Minister Jacobs opened by saying that it was an honour to participate in this Third Meeting. She referred to the report of the Second Meeting, which described the participative process as demanding a real capacity to listen from decision-makers. Minister Jacobs presented two of her own beliefs regarding the value of “listening” and “meeting”:

- “One listens much better when those who speak to you look you directly in the eyes
- The quality of policies increases by integrating the expertise of those who are directly concerned with them”

“As Minister of Social Solidarity, I have always undertaken to meet with those who are directly affected by the policies for which I am responsible. Of course, such meetings are made easier by

the size of the national territory of Luxembourg!”

Minister Jacobs continued by outlining some key principles illustrated by example:

“In society to-day, social policies, especially the policy on inclusion, are no longer based on a principle of charity but on cross-cutting obligations. The commitment of society to promote access for all to decent living conditions ought to be matched by the commitment of the individual to make the necessary efforts to realise that access. The principle of crosscutting obligations gives dignity to dispossessed people: it gives them the status of actors not of those who are helped. The report published after the Second Meeting puts this very clearly when it states:

‘Participation is a right not a favour’

At this point, I recall a conclusion of the European Council of March 2004, which seems to be particularly important in the context that brings us together today. The European Council invites Member States to create – ‘Partnerships for Reform’. These partnerships ought to involve civil society in the promotion of policies, which take forward the Lisbon strategy. At the level of social policies, these partnerships ought to make every effort to reinforce the active involvement of citizens in the construction of a social Europe. If the European Council invitation is followed, such partnerships will be organised at a national level in all Member States. I am sure that these partnerships will interest you!

A partnership between all actors implies the active participation of all citizens – that means you. If you will permit me to take the specific case of Luxembourg: on 6th May 2004, a new law has been passed which gives non-governmental organisations fighting against poverty and social exclusion the right to be members of the High Council (Conseil Supérieur) that advises on policy. This symbolises a shift in policy towards a broader participation of civil society.

Of course, this step, which engages the participation of people in situations of poverty through the medium of the organisations that represent them, could disappoint those who demand direct participation. My reply to that is a reminder that our democracies are organised in a representative way. Those organisations who represent people in poverty are the ‘Allies’ who build the bridges between people in poverty and the civil authori-

ties. The Luxembourg authorities are well disposed to take their messages into account.

I wish you fruitful work, while making you a promise for the future. Luxembourg will be happy to organise the Fourth Meeting during its presidency in a spirit of support and co-operation similar to that of the Third Meeting, involving the EAPN, the Belgian government and the European Commission.

Madame Quintin began by saying that the Third Meeting symbolises the commitment of the Union to eradicate poverty, which is one of the greatest challenges facing social protection systems and which indicates that the European approach to the reform of these systems brings together all the dimensions of social protection. But this reform can only succeed if people in situations of poverty participate actively in the struggle against exclusion. Social Europe ought to benefit everyone, both by creating employment and by struggling against exclusion. It would be senseless if it existed only for businesses and politicians.

Since Europe decided in December 2000, to coordinate national policies in the struggle against exclusion, it has adopted an important objective: the involvement and the mobilisation of all actors, starting from people who live in situations of poverty. The Charter of Fundamental Rights proclaims the right of everyone to live in dignity with sufficient means and accommodation but also the right to accessible health and to education. The involvement of people engaged in the struggle against poverty, particularly at local level, is a logical consequence of this right to dignity.

The period where policies were developed by a few civil servants, who “knew” what was best, has changed. To-day, the voice of people concerned becomes more important for political decisions. An example of this was given in the First Peer Review Seminar in the field of social inclusion, which took place last April in Stockholm, Sweden. This showed that the plans prepared by local associations were an important element in local strategies in the struggle against social exclusion. But much more remains to be done to put in place structured ways of ensuring the participation of those experiencing poverty. However, it is encouraging that since the preparation of the “2003 National Action Plans”, several countries have reinforced the participation of excluded people and the consultation with NGOs who represent them.

While there is still a tendency for some of the National Action Plans to be simply descriptive reports rather than truly strategic plans of action, the 2003 plans do show that many Member States are prepared to reinforce the struggle against exclusion by a more integrated approach and with more ambitious targets. Some have succeeded moreover in reducing the number of people in situations of long-term poverty.

The slowing down of the economy and a rise in unemployment in some countries has led to an increase in the number of people at risk of poverty, notably among vulnerable groups; and mental health problems, alcoholism and drug addiction continue to scar and enfeeble our societies. These local situations justify the integration of the struggle against exclusion into a more global framework where the modernisation and reform of Social Protection systems is combined with an approach, which is targeted directly at groups that are facing the most difficulties. At European level this process of integrating or “streamlining” the common objectives for reform of pension systems, the struggle against social exclusion and the modernisation of health systems has begun and will be completed in 2006.

The 10 new Member States will present their first National Action Plans at the end of July, and thanks to this meeting, these “action plans” can be nearer to the fundamental needs of people in poverty. In the new Member States, where civil society is still, very often, not sufficiently structured and developed, the development of the first “Action Plans” ought to encourage the policy-makers to become more ambitious. The preceding meetings have shown how it is important to have sufficient resources, financial and human to ensure the participation of people in situations of poverty. But it is also important to allow the necessary time to this participation and to build mutual confidence and respect between the different actors.

We hope that NGOs will be stimulated by this process, which obliges each one of us to reflect on the strategies for the struggle against exclusion, to set objectives and to participate in their implementation. The European strategy against social exclusion commits us to go to the next stage. Civil society organisations cannot simply be a force of protest. At a time when the project of a new Constitution for the Union is making social policy one of the three pillars of European democracy, they ought to become an actor in the development of social policy.

Madame Leborgne opened her message from the participants of the Second Meeting of people in poverty with a reminder of the 10 new Member States who bring with them a wave of optimism and challenges for the new Europe of 25. In the other 15 member states, the national action plans 2003–2005 are already in the evaluation phase. The Third Meeting takes us into new territory but is also based on the work of the two previous meetings.

“At the last meeting, we noted our lack of knowledge of the application of National Action Plans on inclusion which were an unknown tool for many of us. We learned how to achieve a certain distance, which permits a level of analysis while still fulfilling our duty to bear witness in these meetings in spite of real difficulties.

I have a powerful recollection of this will to persevere in our work, to discover, to understand how participation works and to dedicate tools and means necessary to make it effective in the struggle against poverty. At the closing session of last year, we felt proud and strong from the work carried out in dignity, suffering and clarity and also very aware of the road still to travel.

We realised that our work was not just “among ourselves” but needed to be integrated into the work within each member state and in the context of a Social Europe. We invited political and economic partners to engage with us in a new level of dialogue. Members of this gathering bring with them poverty as lived experience. We have a role to play in “participative” democracy. By organising and structuring information and proposals from this Third Meeting, we will be able to establish the necessary partnership with European policy-makers in each member state.

There are encouraging signs. At the end of June, in my country in France, the minister for the struggle against precariousness and exclusion organised a national conference on the struggle against exclusion and for insertion. Four working groups on the following themes preceded it:

1. To be actor in a project
2. Access to rights
3. Homelessness
4. Accommodation

The government made a commitment to organise a communication to the general public on the struggle against exclusion and that was included in the French National Action Plan. These examples are typical of many others in other Member States and represent the positive effects of participation rooted at a local level.

I would like to leave you with a message of hope especially for newcomers:

Monsieur Monnet, founding father of Europe said, “We do not bring together states, we unite people.”

Before the workshops begin, I would like to reiterate the thanks to EAPN, its president and all the team for the hard work of organising these meetings. EAPN puts a living face on poverty in Europe. I would also like to thank the Irish Presidency for its support and for the spirit of partnership from the political representatives who participate. I wish to acknowledge the important role of interpreters in helping us understand each other. Finally I would like to welcome each and every one of you. Each of you is an ambassador for your own country and I am sure that you are proud of that.”

Sharing Experience: reports from the Workshops

I. Blue Workshop

CHAIR: Peter Kelly, Scottish Poverty Alliance,

RAPPORTEUR: Danielle Dierckx, Belgium

COACH: Geza Gosztonyi, Hungary

I.1. Processes of Participation:

This workshop examined the processes of participation carefully, especially those at a local and national level. The links between social and economic discrimination were explored in the exchange of experience.

Links between Social and Economic discrimination

“We are just asking for our own rights. When you get a permit, it doesn’t mean that you have rights. Before the EU existed Roma were moving in these areas and we had fewer problems than we do now.”

Participant from Italy

“Things are getting worse and legislation more restricted. I have doubts about the development of the legislation. We feel excluded and rejected. When a country accept migrants its only to use them.”

Participant from Spain

“I work with Rom in Spain. We are an ethnic minority within Europe and we are rejected everywhere from an economic, social, cultural point of view. After the enlargement of the EU, we will be a large minority in Europe.”

Participant from Spain

“I was put in jail in Italy for 20 years. It’s difficult to participate in current society. Sometimes I’m really lost. Now I’m working with ex-offenders and work with them on how to integrate. You should not only demand things to governments. We should also work on the topic of information. Sometimes we deal with ex-prisoners or addicts but in the first place they are people. We should lobby, first on the lowest level of the administration. Civil servants have to understand the people, the importance of participation.”

Participant from Italy

One of the key areas that emerged from discussion, based on the direct experience of participants in the workshop, was the lack of equal participation. The lack of a voice in policy is most extreme in the case of asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers, and people from minority ethnic groups. The failure to ensure the participation of minorities in Europe, for example the 12 million indigenous Roma, is a major barrier to any progress on their participation. The workshop analysed how people who experience poverty and exclusion are not only excluded from policy. For example those who face extremes of discrimination are also more likely to end up in prison. The workshop went on to explore the links between discrimination and broader participation in civil society, summarised in the words of one participant in one sentence – “We have the right to exist, the right to citizenship and those rights are not reflected in everyday life.” An example of good practice from Spain reflected how campaigning can bring people together to overcome their frustration.

Example of Good Practice from Spain

“Aqui vivo; aqui voto” (Here I live, here I vote)

Our campaign had a series of activities demanding:

- change in legislation
- full participation of foreigners as legal residents of the country,

We put foreigners and politicians into contact with each other and organised shadow ballots to vote in shadow elections.

It made the case visible in the media with headlines such as 6000 migrants denied the right to vote

1.2 An example of policy on participation from Finland

The links between anti-poverty, anti-discrimination measures and broader participation in civil society was continued in the discussion of the results of the survey on structural mechanisms. An example of a structure supporting participation in Finland was used to give focus to the discussion.

In Finland the Government has made links between anti-poverty measures and the development of civil society through the Government's Policy Programme on Civil Participation, which is one of four Policy Programmes covering the years 2003–2007. This is a national democracy project and was launched to encourage civil participation and reinforce a functioning democracy. The aim is to improve opportunities for civil and electoral participation and provide more democracy education, and also to strengthen representative democracy. Special attention will be given to integrating less educated, low-income young people who are already, or are at risk of becoming, socially excluded.

Maija Pulli, Työttömien Valtakunnallinen Yhteistoimintajärjestö (TVY) -National Cooperation Organisation of the Unemployed in Finland- presented some of the problems in implementation of this policy programme. New opportunities for example in using Information Communication Technology in the form of digital TV are not open to people without money. The government talks of new challenges; they want to deliberate with citizens; they want to increase voting rates and party memberships. They are looking for new forms of participation: from local to global. There is education and development work on citizenship. Yet there is a danger that, "They use beautiful words but these are just words." Concrete and visible actions must emerge if this policy is to succeed.

1.3 Enlargement of the EU

The potential of linking the anti-poverty agenda to moves to increase involvement of civil society is reinforced by new opportunities emerging with EU-enlargement. There is a need for more in-depth analysis and a clear programme of action as there is disappointment at the speed of change especially in new Member States.

Experience of structures and organisation

"People in Bulgaria are disappointed by the increases in poverty and the lack of progress in participation. The main success: has been inclusion as a member of EAPN."

Participant from Bulgaria

"We strengthen the networks by representing people in poverty on committees for example on the right of users. When I was a member of such a committee, I collected a lot of information and gave it to other mothers. It is a way to represent ourselves."

Participant from France

"We strengthen participation by working in smaller groups. In our network we have ten groups. A lot of people were excluded themselves. We start with those groups and move on to linkages with larger groups. Then we can start to lobby. It can work if linkages are strengthened so that we have a good information and communication from the bottom-up and then again information that comes down."

Participant from UK

"But if you express yourself, it's a way to disturb them. When we take the floor, we are asked to say what they want. When they create employment for us, it is only a series of low paid sessions that don't lead to a job. It's a vicious circle, from one training session to another. We should ask for longer contracts at least. Employers can recruit us at very low costs, but what about their responsibility?"

Participant from France

"We need harmonization of indicators!! Otherwise the NGO's don't speak with one voice. It's about measuring participation. We need an evaluation of the National Action Plans. It's a pity that there isn't a representative of the French Ministry responsible for social cohesion here."

Participant from France

"I would like each country to have a meeting like this at all the national levels to influence the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion."

Participant from Italy

1.4 Networking using a bottom-up approach:

General comments reflected that the failure of participation was most apparent where the links to government structures are missing. On the positive side, participants said that governments now recognize participation as unavoidable. Participation and mobilisation are part of political agenda that makes continuity more possible. There was substantial discussion of how to organise in a way that gave more voice to people who experience poverty and social exclusion. Participants from France, described how to do this using a 'bottom-up' approach to networking which made participation more sustainable.

The discussion on structure referred also to the different levels of power that have to be integrated. In some countries for example in France and Germany, the regional level is very important. There was some experience of where structures exist to create participation, but they submerged in bureaucratic system there was also positive experience of the National Action Plans: in second round. There was more participation and more recognition of the importance of visibility, of transparency and of mutual dialogue.

2. Report: Green Workshop

CHAIR: Léopold Vereecken, EAPN Belgium

RAPPORTEUR: Justyna Wilga, ATD

COACH: Clara Fonseca, EAPN

2.1. From experience to dissemination

The main theme of the workshop was based on the image of poverty that we want to project and discussion focussed on the following key questions:

- How to disseminate information and to whom?
- How to make our lived experience known to the authorities and how we make appeals to them?
- What do we do to improve our lives?

A group from Belgium described a model of how people who experience poverty and who suffered from the privatisation of energy, mobilised an effective lobby which operates at a local, Flemish, federal and European level. Thousands of people contributed to the drafting of a position paper for politicians. The project claims that the EU directive on Privatisation of Energy makes the situation of people in poverty more fragile. Cuts in electricity are the first stage of social exclusion and it is obvious that it is impossible to participate in society without access to energy. A policy on privatisation of energy can help entrepreneurs, some of whom will even avoid taxes. The issue of privatisation of public services emerged as a major theme demonstrating that a European policy can have the increase of poverty and social exclusion as a side effect

A Model of Mobilisation

The project "Poverty and Energy", supported by the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network, organises people in poverty in order to fight for their right to energy. It started with a group of women in Turnhout whose electricity or gas supply was cut and it has gathered momentum throughout Flanders. The project has had direct results: electricity cuts are no longer immediate; a single provider cannot carry them out; and they are subject to a legal process. Given these results, the publicity and the interest from politicians, people involved are very motivated to participate in meetings. The community development agent is responsible for making sure that people are involved in ALL aspects of the campaign and brings them together, acting as contact point:

Working together is worth it:

- Links have been established with other organisations committed to the same cause
- All contacts with partners are made together with the target group
- The project's demands are also presented to experts to ensure that they are scientifically grounded
- The results of the project are widely disseminated. Different public serves request information sessions
- The project is in dialogue with public policymakers.

Community Development Agent: Mieke Clymans PRISO, Steunpunt, Turnhout, Belgium

Many of the participants had similar experiences and described how cuts in electricity or gas led to homelessness and family breakdown. In Denmark for example, one of the participants became homeless because of his inability to pay his electricity bill. His drink problem became alcoholism and led to the breakdown of his family. In Lithuania, a 6-7% rise in VAT on heating is also causing problems with inability to pay.

Cuts in energy: Lived experience

“In Poland, it is not only NGOs who do not manage to pay their electricity; even the railways often have cuts. Current practice is to close the smaller lines. That generates unemployment”

Participant from Poland

“As the state is the only provider, it is free to impose a very high tax to reconnect electricity”.

Participant from Portugal

“After a cut, the cost of reconnecting is enormous”.

Participant from Poland

“With the privatisation of water, the situation in Rom camps will be even worse”

Participant from Portugal

“When you live on Minimex with growing children, it is difficult to pay for energy”

Participant from Netherlands

“In Belgium, there are 5 ministers responsible for energy; it is difficult to contact them, to attract their attention. They all own their own houses so they don't share our experience”.

Participant from Belgium

The campaign on public services was similar to one carried out by the association BARKA in Poland on employment. Participants spoke about the value of support, of training, of education, of employment opportunities. The vicious circle can be reversed when there is opportunity and support for self-organisation. Yet opportunities are often too short term to sustain long-term results.

Creating employment and training opportunities

“We speak with the authorities to present the results of our work. We show them how we educate ourselves, follow therapy (for alcoholics), how by our work we change our lives. We show them how we are capable of taking care of ourselves. Lots of ministers have seen our school and our work. Each time they do not believe me that I am an alcoholic and that I am overcoming huge problems. Even I could not imagine that, after 6 years, I would have studied and obtained a diploma. The testimony of our lives gives us credibility in the eyes of the authorities and our experience has helped prepare legislation, especially in social employment (social co-operatives). It will give NGOs the means to foster entrepreneurial spirit among people in poverty who can, thanks to their privileged status, create employment and training opportunities.”

Participant from Poland

2.2 Right to Basic Services

There is a danger that social security schemes become more like a form of charity while other policies simply reinforce the increasing poverty gap. This has the effect of reinforcing the dualisation of Europe. What can be done to guarantee basic services? Without basic facilities participation is impossible. A clear example based on experience in the workshop is the limitations on mobility of Europeans especially when facilities for people with disability are so limited.

Right to Services and Support – not charity

“In Finland the right to housing, to health care, to education and to information is guaranteed but there is still the problem of unemployment which is at 10% and is even higher among immigrants who do not speak Finnish. They cannot study or be informed. Learning Finnish is difficult but we want to be integrated into society. What can we do so that social security does not become charity for immigrants?”

Participant from Finland

“I used to be dependent on alcohol but you can’t drown your sorrows. Now I am dependent on ‘Kofoed’s Skole’ because it helped me to improve my life.”

Participant from Denmark.

“I used to be a heroin addict but now I have a job for a year, thanks to BARKA.”

Participant from Poland

2.3 Structure and organisation

The workshop participants expressed their reactions to the survey of structural mechanisms. They used the example of the Service for the Struggle against Poverty in Belgium to focus the discussion. The authorities created this initiative as a means of consulting associations. Participation is the main method of work.

“We pay a lot of attention to the written word. At the end of each meeting we verify whether we have a good understanding of what is written. Written documents are so important because they enable people who participated to transmit the content and the work to others. Our discussions are open to professionals (in health or housing) or others for example people from tenants’ associations. We train people in reading and comprehension. So much so, that legal experts, are often surprised at the relevance of questions posed by people in situations of exclusion. Every two years we prepare a report on which the government must comment on.”

Based on the lessons from this experience, we need:

- A written record of meetings
- The opportunity to network and to meet.
- The desire to dialogue (rare from authorities) based on mutual exchange and not charity
- Guarantee that the excluded have the opportunity to express themselves and be heard
- Training

Other participants reflected this experience in the discussion.

Structures and Organisation: The voice of experience

“We need to network and to find partners who know how to make themselves heard, for example unions and the press. Actions and partnerships have a snowball effect.”

“Co-operation with different fields for example people in situations of exclusion with universities to prepare demands and projects.”

“People who are excluded can have an image of themselves as active, as capable of taking initiatives to change their lives, can express themselves within associations, take on projects with other groups, take up training etc.”

“We have an employment workshop where we share experience of the employment market, we also discuss with trade union delegates, businesses. The content of these debates is carefully noted, re-read, approved to constitute the final report. This effort, takes time as does the consultation of partners but it is necessary.”

Participant from Belgium

“In Portugal, to set up a network to claim our rights is difficult. The government cuts grants to networks to weaken them. We do not demand too much so as not to lose the grants.”

Participant from Portugal

“Our project is financed by the Flemish authorities, which do not cut grants because we have a dialogue with them. We chose the theme. Volunteers carry out most of the work of the network for example visits to people in poverty.”

Participant from Belgium

3. Report Orange Workshop

CHAIR: Robin Hanan, EAPN Ireland

RAPPORTEUR: Josée Goris, Belgium

COACH: Klaus Boehhlke, Germany

3.1 Factors of Success

The experience of those in the workshop highlighted how poverty in Europe is increasing while overall wealth is increasing. Yet Social Protection schemes are weaker and less effective. In this context, it is worth asking if there any point in talking about participation?

Participation is still important to maintain poverty on the political agenda and as a means of raising awareness, so that we can take action at a structural level. Successful participation is when your work is visible. On the other hand participation is not enough to correct social measures or policies that are not implemented.

The main points in the discussion were:

- One important factor in success is the visibility of organisations and actions. Some examples are street meetings, dossiers, brochures, actions and demonstrations.
- Following that it is important to maintain constant pressure on government for example by sending them post regularly until their commitment is obtained
- Another factor of success is to combine strength and set up networks of similar organisations with a common goal
- The collaboration with other organisations such as Trade Unions is also a factor of success.
- To lobby politicians and to influence them

From the exchanges in the workshop, it emerges that in some countries elected representatives cut off dialogue with associations. They do not wish to listen to what citizens say and argue that social matters are their concern. The group decided that this issue was a central issue for discussion in the plenary.

3.2 Networks for participation

The presentation of the results of the survey on structural mechanisms used a case study example from Ireland. There are 10 national networks in Ireland, which have a formal relationship with Government on the implementation of the Irish Anti-Poverty Strategy. Each has its own autonomy and identity as a non-governmental organisation and receives Government funding. They are also required to deliver supports to support local anti poverty action and policy influence amongst their membership, which include geographical and communities of interest and individuals living in poverty. One of the networks focuses on the specific needs of lone parents.

Single Parents and Children: a priority

Maria Creighton, is a volunteer member of local single parent support and rights group. She gave a presentation on how networks in Ireland engage the participation of people directly affected based on the experience of ‘OPEN, a single parent network in Ireland of which she is the President. “The message I have to-day is that if lone parents are given opportunities, we will take them. We want economic independence and most of all we want recognition for family diversity. We are real families. The idea of the network is that groups would come together to share information, training and support. Our ethos has always been one of self-help. Lone parents lead local groups and Board members are all lone parents too. In my case, I was unemployed and minding a very young child. The network received funding under the INTEGRA programme and six of us were able to take part in a training programme. OPEN provided childcare and travel costs, without which I would not have been able to attend. This is the first and last time that any organisation provided me with the sort of supports that lone parents need.”

“Many European countries have policies, which are highly developed. Unfortunately in Greece this is not the case”.

Participant from Greece

“In Sweden it is also difficult to be a single parent but we do have a lot of support that is very helpful to us. It’s easy to get childcare. We are also allowed to stay home for eighteen months with pay, as a single parent. We also have an extra benefit every month, the right to reduced rent, and for paid family support. In that case we are very privileged but there are still very many children who suffer from poverty”.

Participant from Sweden

3.3 Material resources

One of the essential conditions of success in a process of participation is that a certain number of groups have the material resources to engage in such a process. Support, for example in the form of improvement in care facilities for children or accessible transport, would enable single parents to increase their level of participation. Migrants are also excluded from participation due to administrative demands. Bureaucratic means that they must go through to obtain papers and legal status are long and full of complicated procedures, which consume their energy. Here too, there is no room for participation. Children are particularly vulnerable. Support for individuals and groups who are ready to take initiatives could prevent people falling into a permanent poverty trap.

Participation and Funding

“Participation and resources go hand in hand. If we want to fight against poverty in the long term we cannot have a system of funding based on projects. We have partnerships to fight against poverty and if we are taken seriously at the European level, adequate funding should follow until we can finally eradicate the problem”.

Participant from Germany

3.4 Violation of human rights

A Bulgarian man whose child has been abducted made a moving presentation of poverty as a violation of human rights, which can lead to vulnerability of children to trafficking. When the children of families in poverty are abducted, nothing is done at a European level. The workshop agreed to raise a question on this at the final session.

Traffic in human beings

Poverty is exploited by corrupt and criminal forces in society who are well organised. The personal testimony of a father highlighted the vulnerability of children living in poverty. His child, Savesin, was taken from the street outside their house when he was seven years old. After several years of desperate searching in Bulgaria, he decided to go on hunger strike outside the offices of the European Union in Brussels to highlight the lack of action at a national level and the need for action on child trafficking at a European level.

“The police in Bulgaria did nothing and when I set up my own private investigation, they opposed it and said I could put my child at risk. Savesin means hope in my language and he is a symbol now of hope for all children who are abducted.”

3.5. Reaching policy-makers and designing policy

One of the essential conditions for participation and for the process of participation to succeed is that politicians are ready to enter into dialogue. A number of delegations present declare that there is no point of access to policy-makers. They distance themselves from associations, cut off their attempts, and still refuse to concern themselves with ‘their business’. The workshop discussed ways of reaching politicians so that they are more actively engaged in discussions with people who experience poverty and social exclusion. It was agreed that the panel should be asked to comment on how to achieve this.

Involvement in designing policy

In Greece it is estimated that about half a million people experience disability and of those about 63% is acquired disability mostly from road accidents and many of them are young people. Utilising the EQUAL initiative, we led a partnership of 16 organisations in Greece. The major goal was to enhance the participation of people with physical disability because very little structured participation existed. It was a wide partnership including the national Greek TV channel and had an extensive media campaign on issues of physical disability and accessibility. 85% of public buildings in Greece are inaccessible. The associations and movements of people with disabilities were involved not only in implementing but also in designing actions together. To have people from grassroots organisations made a difference. This kind of view from below is a good way to counteract our stereotypes. It needs to be taken at a micro level and right through all levels.

European policies against social exclusion are “soft” legislation. The Open Method of Co-ordination tries to make Member States take responsibility for social inclusion but leaves it to their goodwill. The workshop participants were in favour of making sure that the struggle against social exclusion becomes enshrined in “hard” legislation that ensures Member States are accountable. There was also a demand for more work on common standards across Europe for example standards on minimum income. Some of this work needs to take place at a European level.

It was agreed that advice on how to obtain a European resolution which would strengthen the world of voluntary activity and non-governmental organisations. Means of securing finance whilst maintaining autonomy are needed.

4. Purple Workshop

CHAIR: Philip Lonegren, Sweden
RAPPORTEUR: Laura Calvanelli Italy
COACH: Marja Hermans, Belgium

4.1 Living and Working Conditions

One of the key issues that emerged in discussion was the situation of migrant workers who are open to extreme forms of exploitation. They are excluded from the statistics on poverty and are faceless as well as voiceless. What can be done to improve their living and working conditions? When these migrant workers have no legal work permit, they are even more open to exploitation. Steps should be taken to make them legal and visible. The workshop discussed the proposal that migrant workers should have voting rights. This would enable them to open a dialogue with politicians and to assert some basic rights.

The issue of housing which is unoccupied and substandard housing in many cities was major cause for concern among participants. Hidden poverty is on the increase among disabled people, families with a single income, single parent families.

Working and living conditions

“What we see to-day is that many young people have to do three jobs such as low paid work in restaurants or hospitals in order to get a working wage. There is a lack of vocational training for such young people in Sweden”.

Participant from Sweden.

“In the Migrant Rights Centre in Ireland, we make provision and give support for migrant workers – both EU and non-EU nationals. We also have a Migrants Forum where we invite people for example politicians. We document and research the experience of migrant workers who often do the most dirty, dangerous and difficult work. There is also Support Group for migrant domestic workers. Most of these are working for professional people and are needed as carers because of increased female par-

ticipation in the labour market in Ireland. Their residency status depends on a 1-year or 2 year work permit, which makes it easy to end up without documents. Employers use the work permit as a weapon. Even where no work permit is required, there are often problems with tax and social security payments. Many migrants are not aware of their rights and some employers do not know about migrants' rights”

Participant from Ireland

“In Spain there are migrant workers who work seasonally and live in appalling conditions and they do not know their rights and they are exploited. Something should be done at a European level on this”.

Participant from Spain

4.2 Creating the conditions for participation

Another key issue was the range of different levels of participation in the different Member States. The EU should come up with clear guidelines and criteria to ensure that participation of people in situations of poverty takes place in every country.

Co-financing should be provided as it is almost impossible for small non-governmental organisations to respond to opportunities to access EU funding. Training and capacity building are also needed to enable small organisations to participate.

Organising at a local, regional and national level

“The local level is the most important. The first step to share experience with citizens who do not usually have the chance to speak out. I come from Rome and there we are trying out a new way of working where the local government officials meet with local people”.

Participant from Italy

“We have set up a consultation group on the National Action Plan six months ago and we reinforced that we need to start at the local level. In the UK there are lots of commitments on paper to encourage participation but we want real participation in plans at a local and regional level. The Task Force is not based on a series of little plans but on a process, which starts at a local level and feeds into more general plans. In Scotland for example, there are certain statistics, which can be fed into the National Plan”.

Participant from UK

“There is an example of a project, which works well in several districts; the authorities should take it on. We should not close projects that have good results after 6 months. We need longer-term projects, which network together. We must draw lessons from them so that the same mistakes are not repeated in another project”.

Participant from France

4.3 New forms of poverty

The lack of access to Information Communication Technology presented a new form of poverty especially for children. Children cannot look up something on the Internet if they do not have access, this increases educational disadvantage. More could be done at a European level to increase access to Information Communication Technology for small organisations and local groups.

Dialogue between Panel and Participants

There were a number of key themes that underpinned all the discussions in workshops as outlined in the previous section. The Plenary Session took the form of dialogue between the people who had worked in workshops and the members of the panel. Questions and responses are grouped together in this section under headings:

Chairman:

Professor. Seamus O' Cinneide, *University of Maynooth, Ireland*

Members of Panel:

Minister Mary Coughlan, *Minister for Family and Social Affairs,*

Minister Marie Arena, *Ministre de l'Intégration Sociale, Politique des Grandes villes, Egalité des Chances et Fonction Publique, Belgium*

Mr Armindo Silva, *Head of Unit, Social Exclusion, Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs, European Commission*

Ms Brigitte Weinandy, *Member of the EU Social Protection Committee and Conseiller de direction 1ère classe, Ministère de la Famille, de la Solidarité et de*

la Jeunesse - Service national d'action sociale, Luxembourg

Ludo Horemans, *Vice President, European Anti Poverty Network*

Professor Seamus O Cinneide opened the session with a reminder to participants that the Irish Presidency had made a commitment to take up recommendations and suggestions from the Third Meeting of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. **Minister Mary Coughlan** had also made a commitment to combine the findings from the meeting with the conclusions arising from the Irish Presidency Conferences on "Reconciling mobility and social exclusion: the role of employment and social policy" and on "Families, Change and European Social Policy". He invited one of the participants, Madame Sandra Christian from the Netherlands to present some of her conclusions from the Conference on "Families, Change and the European Social Policy".

Testimony on the family: Madame Sandra Christian

Madame Sandra Christian from the Netherlands gave a moving testimony based on her own experience. She described how her reality and her concern for the future as a grandmother of a single parent-family are reflected in similar concerns in all the Member States of the European Union. During the European Conference on the Family and Social Inclusion, under the auspices of the Irish Presidency she was encouraged when she found others faced similar changes in family patterns and values and similar concerns over care for children and care for the elderly. The message she gave to the Minister of the Family to take to the European Council was that we have a responsibility to ensure that our children have a better life than we had.

Questions in relation to Diversity and Discrimination: Access to basic services

What policy would you put in place to guarantee that social security measures are not dumped into the field of solidarity and self-help?

How can the European Union support the integration of the diverse groups who suffer discrimination, who are underrepresented in policy making and over represented in punitive measures?

How can we achieve an anti-stigma policy on all forms of discrimination to achieve access to work, benefits and housing?

What can be done to guarantee basic services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

How can we improve the mobility of people with disability when they have difficulty in gaining access to public places??

How can we ensure that undocumented migrants have easier access to the appropriate documents?

How can we improve the level of care facilities for children which would enable single parents to increase their level of participation?

What is being done in relation to the recognition of qualifications that would increase integration of immigrants? “My degree is not recognised in Italy and in spite of my professional qualifications, I am offered a manual job.”

Minister Mary Coughlan opened her remarks by stating that there are particular vulnerabilities in all national states in relation to poverty. For example with regard to relative poverty, the more people who are in employment, the greater the gap between them and those who are unemployed. The rights of people who have come into another country other than their own need to be secured. There is a lot of legislation on this but not a lot of justice. It is difficult to implement the legislation. Single parents in particular are vulnerable. During the Irish Presidency, there have been steps taken on reconciling work and family life but again it is difficult to get agreements with employers on flexi-time and term-time working for example.

She went on to say “The question of how we involve civil society and how we ensure full participation is one that is not fully resolved yet. In Ireland now all the organisations meet with me as Minister in a budget-setting exercise. The ‘so-called’ bottom-up approach can prove very fruitful, for example recently I carried out an open consultation with many local groups on the family – open to anyone who wanted to attend.

Trying to achieve political change can be frustrating but we need to work on more empowerment and access to political life rather than in confrontation. We need to know how to empower people better through the use of training for example. As politicians, we rely on people like you to tell it like it is.”

Minister Marie Arena responded to these questions by stating that. “We have to ensure that people have access to food, culture, citizenship, education. It is a luxury to speak about participation when basic needs are not being met. The state should not offload its responsibility to NGOs. It is a government responsibility to ensure that there is provision of housing, education and basic income. We have a contradictory situation where we have a goal to eradicate poverty by 2010 and at the same time a series of directives to do less in the field of Social Protection.”

In response to the question on the rights of migrants, she spoke of the different dimensions of poverty, the importance of fundamental rights and the need to take illegal migrants into account.

“We need to talk about migrants at a European level. If one country opts for generosity that country may destroy solidarity and kill generosity. For example in the case of the Netherlands, they had a more open policy which had consequences that they could not sustain and that has led to a less generous policy currently than in other EU states.” She also pointed out that “In Belgium, there is the Centre d’Egalité de Chance which is responsible for follow-up and implementation of legislation on all forms of discrimination on a day to day level. This instrument may be interesting for other Member States.”

With regard to access to housing, **Minister Marie Arena** described the situation where there are an increasing number of dishonest property owners who are making money at the expense of poor people. She gave an example of a five-storey building where a basement with no showers or toilets was rented to 15 illegal migrants paying each 250 euros a month. The solutions in her view were to set up public centres for social aid working with owners to renovate sub-standard housing to create affordable housing.

Mr Armindo Silva, European Commission spoke about the integration of migrants and asylum seekers. He pointed out that recent years have shown a large inflow of illegal migrants and this is raising serious social integration problems that the labour market is not able to solve on its own. At the EU level social integration of migrants and asylum seekers has been made a priority of the EQUAL programme.

“We are now getting the first results of the evaluation of that programme. Another important problem is integration of ethnic minorities, a problem that has been made more serious due to enlargement, is integration. The situation of the Roma population in some of the new

Member States is a cause for concern, as identified in the JIMs. In former communist regimes, the Roma population had special employment programmes but these collapsed with the end of this regime. Roma represent a significant proportion of the population in many of the new countries for example Hungary. We need to reflect on how to tackle the problems raised by extensive social exclusion and poverty among the Roma at EU level. Until now we have followed a horizontal approach in EU programmes without targeting according to ethnic origin. Currently the social situation of Roma women and children is to the forefront as the National reports on social inclusion have highlighted particular problems in these communities which need to be addressed.”

“There is European legislation against discrimination which should be implemented since last year. Yet some Member States have not yet incorporated it into national law. There is a need to strengthen a dialogue within Member States with discussion at every level”.

Mainstreaming a poverty concern across other policies is gaining increasing momentum. In Ireland there is already a poverty-proofing instrument, which recognises that poverty is a crosscut-

ting issue. This instrument can exert pressure for action across all policy areas. At a European level, progress may be enhanced on the basis of the Constitutional Treaty, which includes a specific reference fighting social exclusion among the horizontal concerns to be taken into account by other EU policies, as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Madame Brigitte Weinandy shared the concerns raised in questions on the situation of minorities by saying that “This is a major challenge in the second round of NAPs/incl. In almost all National Action Plans there are measures dealing with the problems faced by minorities and there are discussions on how to monitor progress.”

With regard to the issue of sharing wealth in a context where poverty is increasing as wealth increases, she expressed the view that,

“The mechanisms that exist in the 15 “old” Member States with regard to minimum income, social welfare and integration of minorities represent a commitment to sharing wealth. There are considerable efforts made to make these social measures sustainable so that people in poverty still have access to them.”

Questions in relation to: Participation: Voice for the Voiceless

How can the voice of the voiceless people be part of the development of anti-poverty policies?

What can be done to improve the living and working conditions of migrant workers

What can be done about the educational disadvantages of children who do not have access to the internet?

What can be done to stop child trafficking?

Minister Marie Arena reinforced her view that the testimonies of people based on their direct experience demand immediate responses. She went on to say that, “We also need medium and longer-term perspective to fulfil the goal of eradicating poverty in 10 years. This must be based on fundamental rights. People who are in precarious situations need information in plain language to inform them of their rights.”

With regard to the question on trafficking that was raised, **Minister Mary Coughlan** stressed that it is completely unacceptable that such trafficking takes place. She supported the view that the issue of trafficking is not just an issue for justice and

home affairs at a national level. It is an issue she wishes to progress within Europe and she will do her utmost to ensure that the necessary resources and the political will are present to ensure that it stops.

Minister Marie Arena gave her view on participation as,

“On the question of participation, there are a variety of forms of fostering direct participation in a representative democracy and we should strengthen those by encouraging people to vote. Participation should not be restricted to an elite. For example in Belgium, legislation was passed which extended voting rights to foreigners. This was in spite of an opinion poll where there were

more than 60% against this measure. Strong leadership was needed to overcome unfounded fears.”

Mr Armindo Silva referred to two major issues raised in the questions that deserve more attention:

“One is housing conditions for migrants and the other is the use of information technology and its relation with social exclusion. Under the Community Action programme against social exclusion, the Commission is presently conducting two major studies on these topics in order to identify examples of good practice and explore how to target efforts on these topics effectively.”

With regard to being heard, **Madame Brigitte Weinandy** raised the question of how best to

organise in a way that we are listened to.

“As more direct participation will not solve the problems that people experiencing poverty face, the reference to lobbying is important. People who experience poverty need a lobby to represent their interests. More direct participation will not solve all the problems that we face. In the systems of representative democracy, different interests are voiced through organisations that can enter into dialogue with politicians. You will have more power if you organise your voice through NGOs than if you voice issues directly yourselves. You can appoint people who will take up your issues and identify common interests which are shared by many people.”

Questions in relation to Structures and policies for participation

EU directives lead to the privatisation of energy. In our experience, this leads to no access to energy, which is the first step towards social exclusion. Does the liberalisation of European markets reinforce the duality of society? Can the European authorities commit themselves to counter the effects of EU directives in this field and provide information on the concept of liberalisation of energy?

Can the EU take the lead by recommending that a national meeting on poverty is organised and funded as part of the NAPsInc process in each member state? What can the Council of Ministers do to make such a proposal concrete?

How can small NGOs get more access to EU funding?

What about new forms or training for participation?

To be able to participate, non-governmental organisations need to be strong. What do you propose to guarantee renewable resources, which encourage the autonomy of groups?

We would like to see a struggle against extreme wealth where it is linked to financial fraud rather than harassing people in poverty. What do you plan to do against financial fraud and tax evasion?

“People are rich at the expense of workers. Many people are made redundant when companies close down and move to where they have cheaper workers. What can you do to look at the policies of corporations so that the money they make does not fly away with them.”

One of the essential conditions for participation and for the process of participation to succeed is that politicians are ready to enter into dialogue. A number of delegations present declare that there is no point of access to policy-makers. They distance themselves from associations, cut off their attempts, and still refuse to concern themselves with ‘their business’. How can we mobilise politicians so that they are more actively engaged in our decisions? What should we do, what should we offer them to obtain a dialogue? How can we collaborate with politicians to mainstream the voice of people in poverty?

European policies against social exclusion such as the Open Method of Co-ordination seek to make Member States take responsibility for social inclusion but leave it to their goodwill. How can we make some “soft” legislation more binding?

Can the EU provide clear guidelines and criteria to ensure that participation of people in situations of poverty takes place in every country?

EAPN worked on indicators of social participation but there has been no follow-up to that work. What follow-up on indicators is planned?

Minister Mary Coughlan replied that, “It is difficult to make the links between EU directives and the way that national governments deal with issues. The ‘Open Method of Co-ordination’, which takes the best practice from each member state, has proved an excellent tool for making these links.

With regard to the question on funding and in particular with regard to funding for smaller NGO’s, it is **Minister Mary Coughlan**’s view that this issue can be dealt with in a pragmatic way. Funding should be provided for networks and then through them to smaller groups. Where special initiatives provide successful models, these can then be mainstreamed. There is also a need for a holistic approach. Empowerment, advocacy, childcare, health, family relationships all contribute to our quality of life. One of the problems is that in political discussions we talk about all these issues in a regimented way.

Minister Marie Arena maintained “Access to training is needed not only for the most vulnerable but also for civil servants. In Belgium, people who experience poverty will be recruited to help civil servants in workable implementation of policies.” In response to the question on the privatisation of public services, she voiced her opposition to liberalisation, “We cannot say that we need a strong social Europe and at the same time move towards greater liberalisation of services such as water.”

She responded to questions on indicators by saying that she saw them as necessary but figures are not enough as you do not always see what is behind them. When people talk of the unemployment rate, they do not have an image of unemployed people. Qualitative data can also have a big impact. In Belgium there are tools to measure the efficiency of the actions taken.

Mr Armindo Silva pointed out that “The questions raised by the workshops are wide-ranging in their scope and some of the issues would be better addressed by colleagues in other departments for example those dealing with fraud or with energy. A larger delegation of such colleagues on

the platform would be necessary in order to respond seriously to all the issues raised.”

He went on to say,

“With regard to the issue of legislation at a European level, there is criticism that legislative commitment is too ‘soft’. Those who try to make progress on such legislation within their own country tend to look to the European Union as a last resort. A more appropriate response may be “More power to where the problems lie.” There are no voices in favour of harmonisation of legislation on social grounds in the European Union or much support for centralised European social policy while there are many voices in favour of the Open Method of Co-ordination. This does not mean that we should not try to establish general guidelines on minimum income and other measures as there is also concern about whether the extreme diversity of instruments is able to guarantee a dignified way of life.

The European Social Fund already considers the fight against poverty and social exclusion as a priority. 20% of total funds go to actions classified in this area, but there is concern about access to these funds. Small grants are eligible under current legislation but it is not clear whether the objectives of the 1999 reform were implemented or not. There are some ideas which merit serious attention, for example, a guarantee fund for small NGO’s.”

Madame Brigitte Weinandy maintained that, with regard to legislation, there would be a problem in transferring competences from national to European level in certain areas, as this would distance these policies from the local and national implementation levels. The National Action Plans and the Open Method of Co-ordination count as ‘soft’ policies but they do have quite an impact. Peer pressure can be quite powerful and is one of the most positive aspects of the whole process, which also obliges Member States to make commitments on which progress is reported.

Mr Ludo Horemans spoke on behalf of the European Anti-Poverty Network, “I would like to underline a few important elements which are related to the European Anti-

Poverty Network with regard to your work at the National level and to pressure at a European level. The success of our goals across the network in Europe depends on your success at a national level. You will have to exert pressure at a national level if we are to achieve success in lobbying at a European level.”

He reminded participants that, “The conclusion of the Third Meeting will be presented by Minister Mary Coughlan to the Council of

Ministers. The comments by Mr Silva on behalf of the European Commission on how your questions go beyond the remit of the Ministries of Employment and Social Affairs or indeed the Directorate for Employment and Social Affairs in the European Commission raises interesting issues for the network. The network would underline support and financial resources for empowering and capacity building of NGOs and access to European Funds to achieve that.”

Concluding Remarks

Minister Mary Coughlan concluded with a brief overview of conclusions from the dialogue, which had reinforced a number of key themes for her. These included:

- The value of on-going partnership between the different actors
- Such partnership can lead to fruitful exchanges on policy development
- Exchange of experience is an effective stimulus to action
- Active participation leads to improvements in policy and implementation
- Key stake-holders needed to be well organised and well resourced

Minister Coughlan congratulated all involved in the organisation of the event and said that she would be reporting on the event to the Council of Ministers.

Madame Maria Marinakou President EAPN made the following remarks on behalf of EAPN.

The survey carried out and discussed during the meeting reinforces the direct accounts of participants in workshops. It shows the limitations on structures and mechanisms for involving and engaging people more actively, making them part of the solution, not part of the problem. The National Action Planning process has meant significant improvements but there is still a lack of political will to take these forward.

She made the following recommendations:

- The European Commission could harden certain directives that will make Member States more accountable

- More funding is needed to resource participation at a national level
- Comprehensive social protection systems are needed to cater for basic needs
- Opportunities for training and life long learning need to be more appropriately resourced
- More employment should mean better quality jobs not jobs that are insecure and precarious

She stressed that it is not only a question of minimal economic safety net; it is also about Equality, Solidarity and Justice. The denial of these has implications for an economic Europe as well as for Social Europe. There have been many moving accounts of discrimination that run counter to policy already agreed at a European level. Economic competition pursued without regard for social inclusion creates divisions which will ultimately limit economic prosperity. Privatisation of goods and services without regard for social inclusion will exacerbate homelessness and family breakdown and leads to escalating social costs. We need a Europe where human rights is at the centre and the fight against poverty, is at the top of the agenda.

“We rely on **Minister Mary Coughlan** to distil from the insights of the conference, to pay attention to the aspirations of people who experience poverty and social inclusion and convey them to the Council of Ministers. The 68 million people in the 25 Member States who experience poverty and social exclusion can not be left to wait for some unattainable golden moment when all the conditions are right to address the problems they face but rather they need a better quality of life now”.

Reflection: From Theory to Practice

Gap between theory and practice

The gap between the theory of inclusion and the practice was brought to life by the personal testimonies and examples of participants. They analysed the effect of EU directives or the actions of large corporations on their own lives. The gaps were most striking in the failure to support fundamental rights – a factor that should be borne in mind in the implementation of the new European Constitution. Participants explored the fears in campaigning for change when organisations or individuals are dependent on state agencies for their basic income. Members of the panel shared many of the concerns voiced in the questions that participants raised. There were also a number of issues where differences were not resolved and where more debate and discussion is required.

Issues for further discussion

a) Is the involvement of people who experience poverty best achieved through organisations that represent them or by direct engagement with policy-makers?

Discussion in workshops would indicate that people who experience poverty and exclusion want to have a direct voice and they require support and training through networks and organisations to achieve that. They also need active involvement in organisations and networks so that they can have a chance to bring forward their collective experience. When encouraging participation of people experiencing poverty and exclusion public authorities should ensure that the organisations they consult include those that engage the direct participation of people experiencing poverty and exclusion.

b) Is user consultation and consultation on policy a simultaneous process?

In responses to the survey there was very little distinction made at a national level between user consultation and influence on policy. Responses indicated that an extension of services provided in the form of user consultation and feedback on the design and delivery of services can have major benefits for those who use the service as it can improve the quality of service. However, the debate on the quality of the service may be separate from policy decisions about the level of service provided, the funding provided and the shape of the service. Public authorities, on the whole, prefer divi-

sion of needs into subsets as this can lead to more effective targeting of resources. Voices of participants highlighted the dangers of isolation, stigma and charity instead of justice that is inherent in this approach. Measures need to relate to mainstream policies and to other forms of poverty and social exclusion in order to defeat the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. This was most evident in the discussion of privatisation of energy and water.

c) What are the connections between policy on social protection and measures to eradicate poverty?

We need to increase efforts to make existing social protection measures sustainable so that people in poverty still have access to them. The goal to eradicate poverty by 2010 and at the same time issue series of directives to do less in the field of Social Protection is contradictory. Welfare provision by governments, which is a 'lifeline' to individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion, is under pressure of cut-backs through rationalisation and/or liberalisation.

Issues where there is shared commitment:

Throughout the Third Meeting, the commitment to Fundamental Human Rights and opposition to all forms of discrimination was underlined. The direct and immediate experience of participants demonstrated the gap between theoretical commitment and everyday lived reality. The discrimination against Roma, and against refugees and asylum-seekers is increasing rather than decreasing. The introduction of legislation on formal penalties for not fulfilling policy commitments was discussed. In the short-term stronger use of the Open Method of Co-ordination to exert peer pressure was recommended. In addition there are a number of areas where more co-operation and/or follow-up would be beneficial:

1. A definition, shared by all Member States, of what is meant by structural mechanisms "which engage people experiencing poverty and exclusion in policy making and implementation". This definition should be accompanied by guidelines on allocation of resources to ensure such mechanisms are effective and improved evaluation of results from participation processes.

2. A programme for improving the living and working conditions for migrant workers which makes better use of existing examples of work in this area.
3. Shared guidelines on the roles of the National Governments and NGOs in facilitating the participation of people who experience poverty and social exclusion backed up by training on how to achieve effective participation.
4. A commitment to provide funding for networks at a national level and then through them to smaller groups.
5. Better access to European Social Funds for smaller non-governmental organisations
6. Poverty-Proofing of European policy measures which have direct impact on people in poverty, for example with regard to social protection, liberalisation of energy, working and living conditions of migrant workers.
7. More use of existing models of training and capacity building including more work on validation of qualifications and better access to information communication technology
8. Training for civil servants on participation measures
9. Family-friendly policies. More work with employers on the benefits of family flexible

working conditions e.g. term-time employment would benefit all parents but single parents in particular.

10. Access to information on fundamental rights in plain language for all residents
11. An Action Programme against Child-trafficking.

Part of a Process

The atmosphere of open dialogue was characterised by a healthy and spirited exchange without acrimony or bitterness in all sessions. The Irish Presidency took an important step forward in deepening the dialogue on policy matters between people who experience poverty and the policymakers. There was a general agreement that it would be useful to involve a wider range of actors in this process as policies in many areas have an impact on poverty. There was also general agreement that the meeting should be seen as part of a continuous process. The clear commitment of Madame Jacobs to organise the Fourth Meeting of People who experience Poverty and Exclusion under Luxembourg's EU Presidency means that the process is taken forward to 2005.

Part 3

Survey

Questionnaire

A researcher was commissioned to carry out a survey to seek information on means used to engage participation in preparation for the Third meeting of People experiencing Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The survey was based on a questionnaire that sought:

- Examples of structural mechanisms, which engage people experiencing poverty and exclusion in policymaking and implementation within Member States
- Information and views on whether the existence of such networks has enabled people experiencing poverty and exclusion to have their 'voice' heard in the preparation of National Action Plans for Inclusion.
- Indications of what could be developed in the future

The questionnaire was sent to members of the Social Exclusion Programme Committee and the Executive Committee of EAPN. 11 responses were received with the co-operation of the members of the Social Exclusion Programme Committee in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Sweden and UK. The survey was carried

out in March before enlargement but a response was received from the Ministry of the Czech Republic, which has also been included. Surveys were sent to National networks in the European Anti-Poverty Network and 13 responses were received from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and UK.

The questionnaire asked for examples of mechanisms used to involve and engage people experiencing poverty and exclusion (and the organisations in which they participate) in policy making and implementation. In the letter that accompanied the questionnaire, it was stated that structures should be interpreted as organisations/ bodies/departments, which have a permanent presence. The broader term "mechanism" was intended to also include consultative forums and other forms of engaging direct participation that feed into policy making and implementation. There was considerable variation in the interpretation of what was understood by mechanism or structure, indicating the need for more work on this. A selection of examples has been extracted to indicate the interpretation in March 2004, as this may help establish a base line for this work.

Examples

Austria: Targeted services

The response from different sources in Austria, co-ordinated by the Social Exclusion Programme Committee representative, gave a substantial number of examples of the provision of services to specific groups i.e. children, families, people with disabilities and older people. One of the examples given in Austria is support for a Senior Citizen's Council, where the principles of consultation and participation apply.

If the conditions sought by people who experience poverty and exclusion were followed such opportunity for participation would be extended to the inclusion of other groups such as women, minorities, homeless people etc. For example, in practice, this could mean that the self-help and lobbying initiatives of unemployed women and men who want to create their own national network in Austria could be accorded similar facilities to the Senior Citizen's Council

Example of Mechanism (Non-Government)	Scope	Budget
Austrian Senior Citizen's Council	National	143.892, -€
The Austrian Senior Citizen's Council grants senior citizens in Austria the right of co-determination in all issues that affect them.		

Belgium: Structural Support

There is a clear policy commitment from the Belgian Government to the full participation of those who experience poverty and exclusion in Belgium and a commitment to the development of structures to implement that policy. With regard to meeting the conditions for free and open participation, the "Partnership Agreement between the Federal State, the Communities, and the Regions in Belgium offers a model of co-ordination which could be beneficial to other member states especially those who have not yet set up any mechanism for encouraging participation. The structure has strong links with the non-governmental networks, which provide the contact with those who experience poverty and social exclusion and provides a structural mechanism, which can meet the conditions of the complexities of the Belgian federal structure.

For direct consultation with affected groups, the Government structure depends on the independent Belgian Anti-Poverty Network, which in turn depends on the success of the regional anti-poverty networks, which reflect the federal structure of Belgium. The analysis of these networks draws attention to the gap between implementation of laudable aims, a relevant methodology and the reality. The consultation process has not yet found a way to create the conditions where equals can work together and the time scale for organising participation that has been used to date is too short to generate significant output. The response of the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network indicates that the current investment could deliver a much higher return if there were some strategic increase in resources particularly in support for non-governmental networking at a regional level.

Example of Mechanism (Government)	Scope	Budget
Service for the fight against poverty, insecurity, and social exclusion	National Regional Urban Rural	-€400000

Main aim:

- to set up an inventory, systematize, and analyse information about insecurity, poverty, social exclusion, and access to rights on the basis of established indicators;
- to make concrete recommendations and proposals in order to improve policy and schemes for the prevention of insecurity, for the fight against poverty, and for the integration of people into the society;
- to prepare a report at least every two years;
- to issue, at the request of one of the signatory parties, the Interministerial Social Integration Conference, or on its own initiative, recommendations or to prepare interim reports on any issue that is related to an area that belongs to its tasks;
- to organize structural consultation with the poorest people.

Czech Republic: Targeted Groups

In most of the examples of both non-governmental and governmental mechanisms provided by the Czech Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs there is a focus on services to specific groups. There is also an interesting pilot project for Community Planning where the involvement of all stakeholders (i.e. users, providers, purchasers) is a key aim. The Community Planning

model has been applied in the field of social services where it seeks to establish an open process of identifying needs and resources and of searching for the best solutions.

The Czech example chosen here is one of the few examples, where targeting specific groups includes minority ethnic groups. The example chosen here is of a regional level consultation in

the form of Social and Health Commissions, which advise on the concerns of people with disabilities and Roma. These regional commissions have a mechanism to feed into national consultation.

The response from the Czech Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs also stressed that as they are at the point of drafting their first National Action Plan on Social Inclusion they are keen to learn from the lessons of those who have already used the National Action Planning process.

Example of Mechanism (Non-Government)	Scope	Budget
Social and health commissions – which are advisory body of municipalities The people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in this particular case are people with disabilities and Roma people –	Regional	The funding is provided by regions and municipalities from their budget
Main aim: advise the municipality about health and social issues at the regional level		

Denmark: Closing the Gap between policy and practice

The government and non-government sectors in Denmark offered a combined response, co-ordinated by the representative on the Social Exclusion Programme Committee. The examples given are mainly of social welfare services. The objective of strengthening ‘users’ involvement and the involvement of volunteers in housing organizations is the only specific reference to the participation of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. There is recognition of the need

to develop a spirit of “partnership with both present and former marginalized persons” in this example. The general gap between official policy on participation of the most vulnerable and the implementation of this policy is demonstrated in the example of a government mechanism chosen here.

This example indicates awareness that a more explicit strategy is needed to engage the participation of people who experience poverty in policy development.

Example of Mechanism (Government)	Scope	Budget
Name of initiative: Council for vulnerable groups	National	-€500.000
Main aim: Follow the official policy and come up with proposals.		

Finland: A Mainstream approach

There is no special mechanism at a Ministerial level where people experiencing poverty would be engaged directly into the decision-making processes. However According to the representative on the Social Exclusion Programme Committee from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, consultation is part of their working culture and they pay close attention to the opinion of NGOs when preparing reforms, drafting laws etc. The response from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health stresses that Government in Finland is committed to an administrative system, which actively engages

civil society, seeks to be democratic and transparent in the delivery of its services. All citizens can interconnect straight with the administration at different levels, ministries, politicians etc. The Government response from Finland also emphasised the use of modern communications technology including Internet when listening to the voice of citizens.

Non-Governmental Organisations demonstrate a similar expectation of participation from those affected by poverty and exclusion, for example the **Työttömien Valtakunnallinen Yhteistoimintajärjestö (TVY) - National Cooperation**

Organisation of the Unemployed in Finland- is grounded and governed by unemployed. Everyone working in the TVY organisations was unemployed before employment.

The example chosen from Finland links anti-poverty measures and the development of civil

society, using participatory structural mechanisms as part of the mainstream approach. One of the examples given by the SEP representative is the Government's Policy Programme on Civil Participation, which is one of four Policy Programmes covering the years 2003-2007.

Example of Mechanism (Government)	Scope	Budget
Civil Participation, Government's Policy Programme	National	-€

Finnish Government's Programme includes four so-called Policy Programmes. One of the programmes is Civil Participation Policy Programme covering the years 2003-2007. It is a national democracy project and is launched to encourage civil participation and reinforce a functioning democracy. The aim is to improve opportunities for civil and electoral participation and provide more democracy education, and also to strengthen representative democracy otherwise. The policy programme will coordinate measures aiming to advance democracy. Special attention will be given to integrating into the civil society less educated, low-income young people who are already, or are at risk of becoming, socially excluded.

France: Legal Statute

The Government response to the questionnaire was more closely attuned to the formal requirements of implementing legal statutes, see example, whilst the non-governmental response emphasised the development of shared values within a group, which is formed on the basis of free and voluntary association.

Government support for Social Inclusion programmes of action to date have had strong focus on services and support for individuals and families rather than networks or other mechanisms which engage participation in policy or on measures to implement policy. This can lead to the participation of large service providers in the policy debate through the Conseil National de Lutte

contre les exclusions (National Council against Exclusion), which was established in 1998 after the passing of the law on Social Exclusion.

Non-governmental and governmental responses indicate that there has been no participation of people who experience poverty and social exclusion in National Action Plans on Social Inclusion to date. However there are examples of Government initiatives, which both the Ministry concerned and REALPES/European Anti-Poverty Network see as holding a promise of improvement. A key example is the commitment to a Conference on Poverty, which has afforded the opportunity for groups to present their views in single meetings held in 8 districts.

Example of Mechanism (Government)	Scope	Budget
Name of initiative Loi 2002-2	National	-€

Main Aim: To increase participative mechanisms in social and socio-medical structures. Grants for Emergency Services (CHRS) for groups working towards this aim.

Germany: Scale of Structural Mechanisms

The example of "Beraterkreis" in Germany is an example of the special consultative groups that have been set up in a number of member states. Further comparison of the use of consultative or Advisory Committees and to what degree they

involve people experiencing poverty and exclusion would be useful.

A mechanism such as the Advisory Group of representatives of self-help organisations which is consulted on the National Action Plan, which has a specific focus on the issue and is of a different

order than Government programmes such as for example, “Sozialen Stadt”, the socially integrated city programme in Germany, which has a strong emphasis on participation. A more complete study of structural mechanisms which engage the participation of people who experience poverty would demand a design and implementation process which could take into account considerations of scale and of internal government structures. The response from EAPN Germany highlights this:

“To answer this questionnaire in a complete way would demand research work on the different national, regional and local levels. It is not possible to answer in such a short time.”

The response of the EAPN in Germany also stresses that structural mechanisms required need to operate at a local and regional level with a clear link to the national/federal level if they are to provide a satisfactory level of participation and feedback.

Example of Mechanism (Non-Government)	Scope	Budget
Beraterkreis – Advisory Committee for the poverty and wealth report and for the national action plans	National	-€ Govt funding +Other
Main aim: accompany with the expertise of NGOs, Self-help organisations and other experts the orientation and evaluation of the poverty and wealth report and of the national action plans.		

Greece: Defining a Structural Mechanism for Participation

EAPN Greece adhered to a rigorous definition of a “structural mechanism” in the context of this survey and concluded that, “there are no Organisations working explicitly for the participation and involvement of people experiencing poverty and exclusion in policy making and implementation.”

The tendency to acknowledge certain categories of the poor more than others as identified by EAPN Greece where “the disabled, older people and women for example through their associations are more influential in policy making than homeless or migrants or single parent families.” EAPN Greece has a key role as the only structural mechanism among non-governmental organisations that fulfils the conditions for laying the groundwork for the participatory process. There

is potential to link this to the Government initiative – the National Committee for Social Protection. This Committee has not been in operation since the recent elections. Further information was not available from the member of the Social Exclusion Programme committee at this point.

The response from EAPN Greece acknowledges “the idiosyncrasies and the specificities of the Greek social formation, and the role of the civil society. Greece, being the country with one of the highest poverty rate in the EU-15, and with a civil society with a short history and characterised by lack of institutionalised position in policy decision making.” The issue of participation is seen as a ‘new discourse’ and the exchange of experience with other member states is identified as important to development of good practice.

Ireland: Network of Networks

The example from Ireland demonstrates a close relationship between Government Initiatives and non-governmental initiatives. The Department of Rural, Community and Gaeltacht Affairs provides funding for 10 national anti-poverty networks which engage participation of specific groups. Each national network has its own autonomy and identity as a non-governmental organisation but receives funding for staff with a developmental, policy or administrative role.

Key criteria for this funding are that these networks must engage and involve the groups they represent, use a community development ethos and have a representative structure. They are also required to deliver supports to support local anti poverty action and policy influencing amongst their membership, which include geographical and communities of interest and individuals living in poverty. Whilst these networks do the groundwork that can facilitate participation of the specific group represented by the network, there is still considerable work to be done in developing

the participatory process. The report of the 2002 consultation on the National Action Plans for

Inclusion recognises the need to improve participation structures.

Example of Mechanism (Non-Government)	Scope	Budget
National Anti Poverty Networks Programme	National	-€1,450,000

Main aim: To assist National Anti Poverty Networks to develop their capacity to contribute to policy development at a national level

To develop the capacity of National Anti Poverty Networks to draw policy from their experience at local and national levels. There are 10 National Anti Poverty Networks which represent the interests of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion:

- European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland
- Community Workers' Co-op (CWC)
- Forum of People with Disabilities (FPD)
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)
- Irish Rural Link (IRL)
- Irish Traveller Movement (ITM)
- One Parent Exchange and Network (OPEN)
- Children's Rights Alliance (CRA)
- Irish Refugee Council (IRC)
- Older Women's Network (OWN)

Italy: Local social and economic development

CILAP/European Anti-Poverty Network, Italy has adhered to a rigorous definition of a "structural mechanism" in the context of this survey. There are no non-governmental or governmental mechanisms in existence that reflect the discussion, analysis and reflection of people who experience poverty and social exclusion. An example of Government initiative has been included here as it is an indication of a possible shift towards a developing commitment to participation. It shows the impact of national legislation (Law No 328), which has generated town-planning schemes - "Piani regolatori sociali" (Town plan-

ning-schemes about social policy). These local government mechanisms seek to implement a form of decentralization. According to CILAP, they "seem to work in some big municipalities (such as Rome and Naples) and in some other small municipalities." CILAP the European Anti-Poverty Network in Italy plans to engage with the "Piani regolatori sociali" (Town planning-schemes about social policy).

CILAP co-operates actively with other non-governmental organisations whose equivalents have been listed as mechanisms for engaging participation in other member states - for example Caritas.

Example of Mechanism (Government)	Scope	Budget
"Piani regolatori sociali" (Town planning-schemes on social policy)	Urban	-€

The law n. 328 approved in 2000 on the re-organization of social assistance and public social services at a local level provides for setting up of intermediary organizations in order to plan local projects. Some municipalities created the "Piani regolatori sociali" (Town planning-schemes about social policy), implemented by local communities: they have the aim to promote participation of all the actors in order to carry out local actions of social and economic development.

Luxembourg: Involvement of NGO's in policy-making

Government initiatives in Luxembourg take their starting point from existing legislation and modi-

fications in legal statutes. Rather than direct involvement of those who experience poverty and exclusion, they seek to involve NGO's who bring them together. Thus, a law submitted to

Parliament for adoption in May 2003 provides for the participation of representatives of such NGO's in the broadly representative "Conseil Supérieur à l'action sociale" (High Council for Social Action). In a report to Parliament every 3 years, this High Council establishes the need for action against poverty and social exclusion and recommends policies to answer this need.

In December 2003, awaiting the adoption of the new law, ATD-Quart Monde, A.S.T.I and CARI-TAS already attended a meeting of the High Council as experts.

The example of ASTI is included because its emphasis on rights reflects one of the conditions

of participation, which states, "There will be no place for discrimination in dialogue and exchanges". This is one of the few examples from all those responses, which puts an emphasis on rights or anti-discrimination.

With the change in law, the emphasis is shifting from a service-client relationship to broader consultation on policy. The commitment to involvement of non-governmental organisations in planning and policy is part of a process of linking services to the broader participation of civil society. It is based on the view that the demands of people who experience poverty are better voiced through organisations that represent their interests.

Example of Mechanism (Non-Government)	Scope	Budget
Name of NGO: A.S.T.I. Association de Soutien aux travailleurs immigrés a.s.b.l. /Association for the support of immigrant workers http://www.asti.lu/ Contract with Government (Ministère de la Famille, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Jeunesse)	National	ca. 120.000
Main Aim: To defend the rights and interests of immigrants and promote participation in public life. (The project on training to facilitate integration into the labour market for asylum seekers was also financed by EQUAL.)		

Portugal: Local and Regional Co-operation

The Portuguese Government have proposed the constitution of a NGOs Forum after intensive lobbying by NGOs. In the eyes of the EAPN Portugal this is an important break-through:

"Even if this Forum will not provide the direct participation of people experiencing poverty it will be an important platform for the organisations representing people experiencing poverty to have their voices heard. It will be a

National Forum where NGOs will have the opportunity to be consulted and to give their point of view." (Response to Questionnaire from EAPN Portugal May 2004)

The example chosen reflects increasing government commitment in Portugal to also work at the regional and local levels. The Government has provided funding, which will enable EAPN in Portugal to pilot work on activating privation in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies. It is too early for results of this process of activation.

Example of Mechanism (Non-Government)	Scope	Budget
"Participation Activation" EAPN Portugal	National Regional	-€82.335,38
Main Aim: Since 2002, EAPN Portugal, by a project called "Participation Activation" is trying to implement some actions to develop processes of participation of people experiencing poverty in the definition, implementation and evaluation of anti-poverty policies. In 2003 this project was included in the Portuguese NAPinc and the Portuguese government is financing it. This project is mainly the start of a process and it's an experimental project co-ordinated by the Portuguese EAPN Network. The project is being developed in 4 regions of the country (Porto, Braga, Évora and Coimbra).		

Netherlands: Client or Citizen?

The most significant Government measure of involvement identified by EAPN Netherlands is that of “Client Councils” which have been in operation for some time and are set up to represent users of services for example e.g. homes for elderly, care centres for homeless people and the councils of claimants of benefits at local level.

These are required by national legislation and are funded at a regional and local level. EAPN has

involved the” LKU (Landelijke Kadertraining Uitkeringsgerechtigden” (National Training for Claimants) in training people to enable them to get involved in client-councils, where they can influence policy at local, regional and national level.” (Response from EAPN NL). However training of the people in these client councils by the LKU has been cut this year 2004 for financial reasons (cuts in all departments). This means that involvement of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is reducing not increasing.

Example of Mechanism (Government)	Scope	Budget
Client Councils	National	-€

Aim: To involve user groups in services and in social policy. It is mandatory to hold client councils but they have to be implemented and funded by regional, provincial and local level government.

Spain: From theory to practice

Both Government and non-governmental mechanisms for involving the “afectados” in Spain are weak or non-existent. The European Anti-Poverty Network attributes the only significant thinking on this topic to the work of ATD-Fourth World. In recognition of the need for work on this issue, the Network has created a group with the commitment to develop participation as part of a re-launch of EAPN in Spain. On the basis of this and the participation of a Spanish delegation in the Third European

Meeting, a seminar will be held on the theme of participation.

The Spanish Anti-Poverty Network has identified a partnership of three non-governmental organisations working on a European project to combat discrimination as the best example of participation.

It is envisaged that the lessons from these three programmes will assist in future planning of participation processes in Spain.

Example of Mechanism (Government)	Scope	Budget
Action Programme against discrimination with regard to work, run by three non-governmental organizations.	National	-€

Cáritas: Working on including young people at risk of exclusion in work.
 Red Cross: Working on the inclusion of immigrants in work
 Fundación Secretariado General Gitano: Working on the inclusion of the Rom minority in work.
 The three programmes envisage the participation of those experiencing poverty and exclusion in their process of inclusion in work. They are now in the process of implementation.

Sweden: “User” participation and Civil Society participation

The Swedish response reinforces the gap between the shared aspirations of Government and non-Government approaches and the implementation of procedures, which match aspirations. It is the expressed intention of the Swedish National Action Plan to address the gaps in participation and to “see that citizens have more equal oppor-

tunities for influencing the political process than is the case to-day.” NAPsincl /Sweden Page 37. The example chosen is based on a proposal “to set up a committee for user influence in social development matters in the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, in which the Network against Social Exclusion and representatives of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the National Board of Health and Welfare will have a

major role.” NAP (INCL) Sweden Page 41.

From the Swedish Government perspective it is “difficult to develop extensive and successful exchanges of best practice”. One of the examples of good practice from the perspective of the

Government is that of local development agreements, which appear to relate to a body of theory and practice of community development or local social development, underpinned by commitment to participation and can work across a broad range of political and other ideologies.

Example of Mechanism (Government)	Scope	Budget
“Committee for User Influence”	National	-€

To act as a body for consultation between the public sector and voluntary and users’ organizations for the purpose of mobilizing all relevant bodies in the efforts to combat economic and social vulnerability.

UK: Decentralisation

The response from the UK, states that the UK Government “recognises that to tackle poverty and social exclusion effectively, it must work in partnership with a wide range of people.” Their approach depends on the devolution of responsibility to the Scottish and Welsh Assembly and to the Northern Ireland Administration.

The UK Department of Work and Pensions “consult with the Social Policy Task Force (SPTF). The SPTF is a network/umbrella group of NGOs established largely to work with the UK Government on the National Action Plans Inclusion.” The Social Policy Task Force which

was initiated by EAPN has been involved in developing the NAP Inclusion 2003. This has further led to a joint project to develop a Participation Toolkit that will enhance the participation of people with experience of poverty in the development of the NAPInc. The UK comments on the added value of the close working relationship between government and non-government are enthusiastic, “ A more open participative process has had the benefit of highlighting particular problems with the implementation of policies to policy makers. Without the direct participation of people with experience of poverty, some of these problems would have received less attention.”

Example of Mechanism (Government)	Scope	Budget
Name of initiative: Social Inclusion Partnerships http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk	Scotland	4.1mUK sterling

Aim: Main aim: Involving people experiencing poverty and exclusion in the improvement of local public service delivery in disadvantaged areas.

Appendix I

Programme

Third European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty and Exclusion

Programme

Thursday May 27 Arrival of Delegates

– 19.00

Buffet at Hotel Dorint

Friday May 28 Conference Chairperson: Professor Seamus O Cinneide

– 9.00 - 9.45

Opening Plenary

Mr Gerry Mangan, *Representative of Irish Presidency*

Minister Marie Arena, *Ministre de l'Intégration Sociale, Politique des Grandes villes, Egalité des Chances et Fonction Publique, Belgium*

Madame Marie-Josée Jacobs, *Minister for Family Affairs, Social Solidarity and Youth, Luxembourg*

Madame Odile Quintin, *Director General for Employment and Social Affairs, European Commission*

Madame Isabelle Leborgne, *Association Action Partenariat International Economique et Social, Participant of the second meeting*

– 9.45 - 10.15

Tea/Coffee

– 10.15 - 13.00

Workshops 1: Introductions and Experience Sharing:

Short synthesis of the 1st and 2nd Meeting

Participants introduce themselves, their association/NGO and the main successes and challenges faced by their association/NGO.

The issues raised will form agreed common questions for the dialogue session in the final plenary.

– 13.00 - 14.30

Lunch

– 14.30 - 16.00

Workshops 2: Participation – What is the practice ?

Presentation of the main outcomes of the survey

Presentation of an Example arising from the survey (Discussion)

Sharing of examples of participation in which participants are involved.

– 16.00 - 16.30

Tea/Coffee

– 16.30 - 17.30

Workshops 2 ctd.

Open Discussion on participation

– Evening

Dinner at the RESIDENCE PALACE Rue de la Loi 155

Catering by BOUILLON DE CULTURES, Brussels association
Training and social integration.

Irish Music Band – Siomon O DONNGHAILE
African music – Federation Hope for Africa

Saturday May 29 Conference Chair: Professor Seamus O’CINNEIDE,

– 9.15 - 10.15

Workshops 3: Preparation of Feedback to Plenary

– 10.15 - 10.45

Tea/Coffee

– 10.45 - 13.15

Plenary

Reports from Other Presidency Events: Madame Sandra Christian, *EAPN Netherlands*

Reports and questions from Workshops

Response from Panel

Open Discussion

Panel

Minister Mary Coughlan, *Minister for Family and Social Affairs,*

Minister Marie Arena, *Ministre de l’Intégration Sociale, Politique des Grandes villes, Egalité des Chances et Fonction Publique, Belgium*

Mr Armindo Silva, *Head of Unit, Social Exclusion, Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs, European Commission*

Ms Brigitte Weinandy, *Member of the EU Social Protection Committee and Conseiller de direction 1ère classe, Ministère de la Famille, de la Solidarité et de la Jeunesse - Service national d’action sociale, Luxembourg*

Ludo Horemans, *Vice President, European Anti Poverty Network*

– 13.15 - 13.30

Closing Plenary

Mary Coughlan, *T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Ireland*

Maria Marinakou, *EAPN, President*

Chairpersons Concluding Remarks

– 13.30

Family Photograph

Lunch

– 14.30

Participants free to Depart

Appendix II

List of Participants

3rd European Meeting of People experiencing Poverty

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