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**Fall**



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| **EVALUATION REPORT**External Evaluation of EAPN  |

**First Draft**

**7 August 2014**

Report prepared by

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# Executive Summary

**Approach**

The aim of this evaluation is to assess the current functioning of the EAPN, the relevance of its structures as well as its work, content, and the involvement of its members. The evaluation is undertaken at the time at which the EAPN is completing the implementation of the current Strategic Plan (2012-2014). The findings of this evaluation should therefore provide guidance for development of the next Strategic Plan 2015-2018.

For the purpose of this evaluation, the following methods have been used: in-depth interviews with EAPN staff and other key stakeholders; a workshop with the EAPN Secretariat; based on the preliminary findings of the interviews and the workshop a questionnaire was designed and sent to EAPN members; an analysis of secondary sources; additionally, the evaluators participated in the EXCO meeting which included a one day discussion about the current situation of the EAPN and future working plan and structures. The evaluation has been conducted between April and September 2014.

**Structure of the Report**

The report summarises the key findings from the evaluation sources focusing on the six evaluation areas: (i) Mission and Goals, (ii) Membership engagement, (iii) Working with EU institutions and stakeholders, (iv) Working Structures and Methods, (v) Funding, (vi) Participation of people experiencing poverty.

Each section corresponds to one of these focus areas and offers firstly, a summary of the key findings; secondly, comments and elaborates on these findings underscoring a series of areas for improvement, and lastly, provides recommendations for future directions under the future EAPN Strategic Plan.

**Key findings and recommendations**

***Mission and goals***

For almost 25 years, EAPN has been working in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Its work has been very important for putting poverty on European agenda. Today, its mission and raison d’être continues to be of highest importance as Europe finds itself at a time when poverty and social exclusion are growing. Nevertheless, it appears that the EAPN risks losing weight in the current scenario and faces the challenge of solving tensions between its mission (broad) and available resources (limited). There are also doubts about priorities in orientation: advocacy, capacity-building and mutual exchange.

*The evaluation recommends:*

* To establish clear priorities for action in the coming years and to focus the agenda on specific targets, according to available resources and means.
* To drive the EAPN agenda according to the needs and demands of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion while taking into account European policies.
* To balance advocacy work with capacity-building measures which should also be reflected in the goals and future actions of the EAPN; allocate resources accordantly
* Establish indicators in the future Strategic Plan so that the objectives can be measured and results can be demonstrated.

***Membership engagement***

Over the years, EAPN has expanded and today, is a coalition of 29 National Networks of voluntary organisations and grassroots groups as well as 18 European Organisations. The diversity of the national networks reflects the diversity in Europe as there is no single model and its members have different compositions and approaches. Furthermore, different opinions, trends and interests between National Networks and European Organisations can be observed which in some cases may result in simultaneous cooperation-competition scenarios. EAPN’s diversity is a strength and weakness at the same time, and there is a need for common understanding and cooperation under the same mission. The level of development of the different National Networks is very diverse and so are the expectations, resulting in different levels of engagement and participation with the EAPN. As a result the main challenge is to integrate the diversity of situations.

*The evaluation recommends:*

* To find possible different levels of participation from members in order to integrate their diversity and meet their expectations (e.g. obligatory participation in core activities for all the members and flexible cooperation and engagement in certain activities according to areas of interest).
* To strengthen the support and development of National Networks by different means and to invest more in capacity building for less-resourced networks.
* To create conditions for a more active engagement by European Organisations and mutual benefits for both sides; these include flexible ways for the participation and/or cooperation of European Organisations in/with the National Networks.
* To increase the support of the Secretariat to National Networks by better responding to their needs and demands.

***Working with EU institutions, stakeholders and peers***

EAPN is an open organisation that has established alliances and found ways of cooperation with different stakeholders. Its works with European institutions has been mainly focused on the European Commission (i.e. DG Employment and Social Affairs). In its relations with the EC, EAPN has been considered a special organisation due to its role and composition. Today, the European scenario is different and the patterns of relations with European institutions are changing (less dialogue, towards project-funding, joint dialogue with other institutions); as a result, EAPN is losing its voice and its previous space.

*The evaluation recommends:*

* Adapt and synchronise the work of the EAPN both at the European level (Secretariat, BUREAU, EUISG group) and at the national level (National Networks) in order to gain influence European policies (especially in the European Council and the European Parliament)
* Increase the work with other DGs on the basis of other dimensions of the poverty agenda; e.g. DG Regio, DG EAC, DG Sanco, DG Justice.
* Strengthen the relations with the European Parliament and support the National Networks in their relations with the European MPs.
* Review its participation in joint initiatives (including the Social Platform) from the perspective of strengthening forces, achieving common results, balancing representation and gaining mutual visibility.

***Working structures and methods***

The work of the EAPN is well appreciated by the stakeholders, as they consider it professional and efficient. The EAPN has growing fast and has become a big and complex network over the years. Governing bodies and managing systems need to be adapted to the current situation and, as a consequence, better consistency of the entire system is required. The decision making process is not always clear, nor efficient and the working plan appears to be a result of cumulative activities at times when focusing in the essential would be required. The working methods need to be adapted to the new circumstances.

*The evaluation recommends:*

* Clarify the decision-making process “who is responsible for which type of decision”, taking into account the simplification of decision-making processes.
* Review the continuation of current activities for the future working plan, better integrate them in the future and reduce and redefine task forces and subgroups accordantly.
* Improve the process of selection of participants in governing bodies as well as for activities and foster their commitment. The adoption of a Code of Conduct is recommended.
* Better balance activities of the Secretariat between advocacy work and providing support to the networks, including volume and content of materials (e.g. less documents, more focused and reader/user-friendly); enhance efficiency of financial management;
* Modernise systems of internal communication in order to make them user-friendlier (e.g. more use of electronic means, more visual communication).

***Funding***

Since its founding, the EAPN has been regularly financed by DG Employment and Social Affairs while other funds have been the exception. Recently, the budget allocated by DG Employment has been drastically reduced and nowadays the Commission intends to support projects rather than providing funding for core activities; this trend is expected to aggravate. These changes in funding sources puts the sustainability of the EAPN at risk and the network therefore needs to take the problem seriously as soon as possible and designed a long-term funding strategy in order to mitigate this risk.

*The evaluation recommends:*

* To design a long-term fundraising strategy (including concrete actions at the short-term), based on the principle of diversification of funding sources in order to avoid dependency.
* To seek funding from the European Commission for both core activities (as EAPN is an essential part of civil dialogue), and for specific projects.
* To be prepared for the consequences of further budget cuts and prepare alternatives to mitigate risks.

***Participation of people experiencing poverty***

EAPN is a network of organisations aimed at combating poverty and social exclusion. The participation of people experiencing poverty is one of the network’s strengths and a well-established process. EAPN wants to deepen this practice and ensure that a strengthening of this process continues to form part its core business. The network has been holding regular meetings of people experiencing poverty (PEP) for twelve years which have been a major source of inspiration for its activities. Nevertheless, there is a common feeling that much more could be done for deepening the participation of people experiencing poverty at all levels of the network.

*The evaluation recommends:*

* To guarantee the financial resources for the celebration of the annual PEP meeting as it is considered one of the core activities of the network.
* To identify concrete goals for the coming years to increase the participation of people experiencing poverty at all levels, and develop concrete measures for making this possible.

# Objectives

This external evaluation **aims** to assess the current functioning of the EAPN, the relevance of its structures as well as the work, content and the involvement of its members. The evaluation is undertaken at the time when the EAPN is finishing the implementation of the current Strategic Plan (2012-2014) and is preparing the next one for the period of 2015-2018.

The external evaluation analyses the current situation (diagnostic approach) and focuses on future challenges (prospective approach), by taking into account EAPN resources and capabilities. **The evaluation aims to:**

1. Assess if the goals and objectives approved in the EAPN Strategic Plan (2012 – 2014) continue to be adequate for the coming years and to what extent they need to be changed, adjusted or prioritised according to the current trend in relation to poverty and social exclusion, the EAPN mission and its capacities and resources.
2. Assess the suitability of the current working structures and their functioning (*EXCO and the General Assembly, Task Forces, EUISG, etc.)* according to the challenges that the EAPN face in the coming years. Special attention is being paid to their consistency with the objectives and priorities for the future of the EAPN, the alignment between the overall activities of the EAPN and the potential overlapping among them as well as adequate cooperation and synergies.
3. Assess to what extend the current working methods, including organisational procedures are adequate and efficient. Special attention is being paid to the adequate balance between participation and efficiency with a particular focus on results-orientation, the engagement of National Networks, the capacity to integrate existing diversity and to foster mutual learning as well as support and the active engagement of people experiencing poverty.

The evaluation provides EAPN with an external perspective on how to build a stronger and more resilient network with active and dynamic member engagement, including people experiencing poverty. The following questions were agreed with EAPN at the beginning and form the focus of the evaluation:

1. *Are the statutory and operational working structures adequate and effective in the current reality of EAPN (EXCO and the General Assembly responsibilities; EUISG and EXCO cooperation, Task Forces, etc.)?*
2. *Are the policy objectives and structures for engaging with them the right ones and what is the impact of EAPN lobbying and advocacy work at EU and national level?*
3. *How to develop strong national networks and organise capacity building for members, given the new conditions?*
4. *How to fundraise and ensure that solidarity funding contributes to stronger members who engage better with EAPN?*
5. *How to continue to strengthen direct participation of people experiencing poverty inside EAPN and in its external work?*

These questions have been translated into six evaluation focus areas that articulate the presentation of the evaluation’s findings: (i) Mission and Goals, (ii) Membership engagement, (iii) Working with EU institutions and stakeholders, (iv) Working Structures and Methods, (v) Funding, (vi) Participation of people experiencing poverty.

# Methodology

The external evaluation has been undertaken/developed with the following **complementary methods**:

* **An electronic questionnaire** was sent to the National Networks (29) and to European Organisations (18); a total of 21 questionnaires have been received 14 from the National Networks and 7 from the European Organisations.
* **Seven in depth interviews** were held with the following people:the current EAPN President, the current Director, the former Director, one member form the EXCO, one representative from the European Commission, one representative from a peer organisation, one representative from the European Parliament.
* **A Workshop with the Secretariat** was held with the participation of 9 staff members including the Director.
* **Analysis of secondary sources:** For the development of the evaluation a variety of documents have been analysed, such as different working papers and materials produced by the EAPN, the EXCO and the working groups, notably related to EAPN’s strategy and different areas of work.
* **Participation in the EXCO meeting:** Additionally, the evaluators have participated in the EXCO meeting held in June in Tallinn where a one-day discussion about the current situation of the EAPN and future working plan and structures took place. At that meeting preliminary results of this evaluation were presented in order to receive feedback and comments from the EXCO members.

**Timeframe:**

The evaluation was undertaken between April and September 2014. Provisional results were presented to the EXCO in June and the initial draft was presented in August.

**Structure of the report:**

In order to facilitate the reading of this report, the presentation of evaluation results follows the same structure for each of the six focus areas: firstly, summary of key findings; secondly, areas of improvement based on the previously-presented findings, and lastly, recommendations for future directions under the future EAPN Strategic Plan.

# 1. Mission and Goals

## 1.1. Opinions

Note: Scale 1-5 (1=not effective; 5=very effective)

By means of the questionnaires, members evaluated the **effectiveness of EAPN’s work on its current mission** by voting on the three EAPN mission statements (1 = not effective, 5 = very effective). All three statements received an average score higher than 3, whereby the third mission statement scored the highest (3.6). It is worth highlighting that, compared to the other mission statements, scores on the third statement have the smallest range (2-5), meaning that members voted rather consistently (mostly 3 and 4), and the distribution of scores is coherent between National Networks (NNs) and European Organisations (EOs). Notably, this coherency in scores for the first two mission statements can only be observed in votes from EOs, whose score range is also smaller (2-4). Discrepancy is most evident in the opinion of national networks on the efficiency of EPAN’s work on mission statement 2 which received an almost even distribution of scores ranging from 1 to 5.

In general, members agreed with the phrasing of **current mission statements** to be included in the new Strategic Plan. Some members stressed that, despite the adequacy of its mission, EAPN’s instruments to fulfil it appear to be out-dated (e.g. PePs, lobbying not being the only tool). Some other members consider it would be important to *include the* *defence of human and fundamental rights* (poverty as a rights question) into EPAN’s mission. Other suggestions relate to expanding EAPN’s missionto *supporting National Networks* in drawing up strategies and actions against poverty and social exclusion, e.g. by rephrasing mission statement 1 (“promote and disseminate best knowledge about quality of actions against poverty and social exclusion”).

Note: Scale 1-5 (1=not relevant; 5=very relevant)

Asked about the **relevance of EAPN’s current goals** **for its next Strategic Plan** (1 = not relevant, 5 = very relevant), members awarded their highest scores to the first two goals (means: 4.4 and 4.3), whereas the third goal received the lowest score (3.6). It is worth noting that NNs appear to be in agreement on the high relevancy of the second goal, which exclusively received scores of 4 and 5 from NNs, while most EOs voted with 3 on this goal. Most diverging scores were received for the third goal, which was considered (very) relevant by all networks (3-5, with most scores in 5), whereas most EOs do not consider it important at all (mostly 1-2, with one exception of 5). With a few exceptions, the first goal was considered very relevant (5) by most NNs and half of EOs, representing the highest degree of unanimity among all members.

Most opinions expressed about the **wording of the goals** highlighted the need to rephrase goal no. 3 (considered either too vague or not adequate at all) and goal no. 1 (should be stronger, expressing what EAPN stands for). Suggestions for **new goals** included the strengthening of EAPN as a social actor and interlocutor on specific issues, a focus on awareness raising and advocacy (poverty as a human rights violation) and the recognition of EAPN’s analytical work as well as its ability to propose concrete anti-poverty positions that allow for feasible actions. Furthermore, it was stressed that not all members (esp. NNs) were able to follow the current goals, which is why they would need to be prioritised and their sub-goals shaped more concretely.

The opinions gathered from the **interviews confirm the answers to the questionnaire**, as most of the interviewees consider that EAPN mission and goals are generally clear and should be kept in the future. The EAPN is said to be effective in putting the issue of poverty on the EU agenda and has contributed to the adoption of the poverty targets in the EU 2020 Strategy.

## 1.2. Areas of improvement

The current scenario at the European level is changing: the economic crisis has increased levels of poverty and social exclusion, inequalities are growing across Europe and many people are losing their rights. At the same time, European institutions are changing (new Parliament, new Commissioners) and the Commission’s expectations from the EAPN have changed (now they tend to focus more on reporting about situations and demonstrating results). This new situation raises debates about how the EAPN could improve the implementation of its mission in the future as well as about its primary orientation:

**The priorities for action:**

There appears to be a consensus among member on the current key concerns related to poverty, which are increasing inequalities, people in extreme poverty, decreasing social protection, access to services and access to rights. Furthermore, members stressed the importance of (new) groups being affected by poverty, namely children and families, workers (in-work poverty), youth and the elderly.

**More focused agenda**

Despite this agreement on recent developments, the opinions gathered revealed conflicting positions on the proposed focus of EAPN’s future approach; there appear to be discrepancies on whether this approach should be a broader (e.g. social protection, inequalities etc.) or a more focused one (e.g. poverty and social exclusion, new forms of exclusion). While some opinions push for a broader agenda and consider that it is important to look at the bigger picture and have a comprehensive strategy (e.g. social protection floor) others consider that poverty targets should drive the core agenda (i.e. minimum income, the protection of rights of people in poverty). A common understanding seems to be that poverty is a very strong “brand” for the EAPN, but the definition of poverty is broad and EAPN needs to focus on some specific issues for the next years in order to be effective.

**Driven agenda:**

There is a common understanding that until now, the agenda of the EAPN has been driven mainly by European institutions, notably by the European Commission priorities (poverty target, SIP, Structural Funds, social innovation etc.). Today, expectations from the Commission about EAPN are rather related to demonstrating outcomes or consequences: providing information of what is happening in the Member States, stories from “the field”, demonstrating the functioning (or non-) of benefit systems, influencing national parliaments, etc. On the other hand, EAPN understands itself as part of the European project and intends to influence the agenda of European institutions, e.g. by pushing for the minimum income agenda and fostering EU anti-poverty measures.

**The approach: Advocacy/capacity**

There is a common consensus that until now EAPN has been primarily an advocacy organisation. However, nowadays, many people think that there is a need to balance the policy work with the capacity work whereby both should go hand in hand, as capacity is very important to influence the national level and influencing the national level is crucial for influencing the European agenda. In the evaluation, it was observed that, while some people prefer to be more activists (campaigns), others prefer to be more “brained” (producing reports), and other insist on the importance of exchange and mutual learning.

**Indicators and measurement of results**

What appears most striking in view of the external evaluators is the complete absence of any type of performance indicators in the current EAPN Strategic Plan (especially with regards to the goals and sub-goals) that would allow for an objective evaluation of achievements. Therefore, the above-presented “scores” on the efficiency and relevance of EAPN’s current mission and goals cannot be considered as actual results but merely highlight the issues of the highest and lowest consensus among EAPN members. The contradicting opinions expressed in the evaluation could reflect a lack of clarity in EAPN’s overall strategy (hence, its current Strategic Plan) and highlight the need for setting clearer objectives. Notably, only one surveyed member identified the lack of performance indicators as a key weakness in the evaluation.

## 1.3. Recommendations

Considering the above observations, the following recommendations can be made for the future work of the EAPN and the new Strategic Plan 2015-2018:

**Recommendations**

* Consider **balancing advocacy work with capacity-building** measures which should also be reflected in the goals and future actions of the EAPN; allocate resources accordantly.
* **Focus on some specific** issues/targets for the next years in order to strengthen the effectiveness of EPAN’s work; it is worth highlighting that this should be done in the framework of the broader understanding of poverty (related to macroeconomic, inequalities, social protection systems, access to rights, etc.).
* Clearly **distinguish between EAPN’s mission statement** (i.e. guiding principles and overall goals of EAPN’s work) **and goals** (i.e. objectives the network aims to achieve in period of the coming Strategic Plan).
* Consider **replacing the current term “goal” with “objective”** or “strategic objective” which expresses a measurable result and is considered a more appropriate term for a Strategic Plan of 3-4 years.
* **Formulate EAPN objectives** (currently “goals”) **in a clearer language**, ensuring that they express a tangible target and/or result that all members agree on, understand and are able to follow/work for.
* Establish **indicators** in the future Strategic Plan (possible outcome and impact indicators) so that the objectives can be measurable and the results can be demonstrated. Indicators should be identified according to EAPN’s future objectives and could include a measuring of the four pillars of the new EAPN development framework for National Networks.

# 2. Membership Engagement

## 2.1. Opinions

A common **agreement on the focus of EAPN’s work** is one of the prerequisites for the participation and engagement of its members. Based on the key ideas expressed in previously conducted interviews, the evaluation questionnaire asked members to rank the importance that should be given to the following areas in the future (1 = low priority, 4 = high priority):

Note: Rank 1-5=4 (1=low priority; 4=high priority)

Although the above graph only demonstrates small differences, a closer look at the distribution of scores paints a clearer picture of the result: 85% of members ranked “**Bringing the voice of people experiencing poverty** and social exclusion closer to shaping the EU we want” as highest priority, while 15% ranked it second-highest, representing one of the **highest degrees of consensus** in the entire evaluation. In view of this result, it should be mentioned that some members of EU institutions interviewed for this evaluation expressed exceptionally high appreciation of occasions that provided the opportunity of direct dialog with people experiencing poverty (e.g. PePs) as well as EAPN’s capacity to organise such events. However, at the same time, internal EAPN opinions highlight the need for a genuine discussion on the future of PePs (frustration at their purpose).

In terms of total scores, “Advocacy at European level/influencing the EU policy making process/EU semester process” was ranked as second priority. However, the broad dispersion of ranks (i.e. an even distribution between highest and lowest priority, notably among both EOs and NNs) demonstrates a strong discord over this potential priority. Based on comments expressed by several NNs in various sections of the questionnaire, it may well be assumed that this divergence in opinions is related to the frustration at the “feeling” of not being able to influence EU policy processes from the national level (e.g. lack of capacity), not understanding them (and hence, not knowing how to influence them) or the conviction about the unimportance of EU policies (esp. Europe 2020) for NN’s activities at the national level.

EAPN’s **National Networks** vary greatly in size, approaches and engagement. This diversity was identified as being a major strength and weakness at the same time; therefore, the evaluation asked how this diversity could be translated into better membership engagement. A number of proposals suggested the strengthening of peer support and mutual learning through a kind of twinning between networks (e.g. as previously done among Nordic countries, Spain-Portugal), particularly between networks that are considered to be “stronger” and “weaker”. Further recommendations include the cooperation of some networks under specific projects or thematic issues (e.g. suggestion to analyse annual reports in order to find out common interests/strengths), as well as strengthening member support by clustering members according to similar characteristics (e.g. size, region etc.) which could be supported by respective coordinators at the Secretariat who would be responsible for these networks (i.e. more specific membership support provided by the Secretariat). Moreover, the (re)introduction of trainings for new members was suggested.

It is worth highlighting that opinions expressed in the evaluation demonstrate a clear conflict in the need to prioritise network building and mutual learning, with high divergences and an uneven distribution of scores awarded by NNs to these potential priorities, consequently resulting in a low score (see chart on EAP’s future work focus). At the same time, a variety of concrete proposals clearly highlight that the development and support of NNs should become an EAPN priority (again).

Most **European Organisations** expressed (in some cases high levels) of frustration regarding their membership. Some members stressed that the role of European Organisations in EAPN would need to be entirely revisited. Moreover, it appears that some EOs are of the opinion that their work (due to their specialisation on a specific issue) brings added value to EAPN, whereas they perceive that their membership does not bring the desired added value to their own organisation. Strong criticism and frustration was expressed about “purposely ignoring” or even “lobbying against” some opinions expressed by EOs (esp. when EOs tried to bring a poverty-related issue of their specialisation on EAPN’s agenda).

The evaluation had asked all members to express their level of agreement with a selection of statements that were related to the possible reasons for and/or the added value of being an EAPN member. In this context, it is worth highlighting that despite the lower results, among EOs the highest total scores were reached for the statement “EAPN allows my Organisation to share views, exchange experiences and/or form alliances with other Organisation/Networks with a similar agenda” and “EAPN tools and support (e.g. publications, events, trainings etc.) help my Network/Organisation to access quality information”; however, the high dispersion of scores by EOs does not allow for a confirmation of an agreement between all EOs on these statements.

## 2.2. Areas of improvement

The principal strength of EAPN in its policy work is the capacity to engage its members in a common project by defining clear targets and aligning forces at the European, national and the grassroots level; the possibility to influence European policies will depend on the achievement of this challenge. In this task, EAPN has always had difficulties which appear to be increasing recently. Based on the results of this research, four critical areas for improvement can be identified:

**Managing and benefiting from diversity**

The diversity of EAPN’s members is one of the networks biggest challenges, which has not only an impact on membership engagement but on the networks capacity to set priorities, consequently affecting EAPN’s mission, goals and working methods. EAPN is a network of networks which is very diverse in its composition that is determined characteristics of its members in different countries as well as the EOs (grass root organizations, universities, people experiencing poverty, experts, social workers, trade unions, etc.). This fact demonstrates the difficulty in finding a consensus for building up a common project.

* While the diversity of EAPN members is generally considered positive aspect that can strengthen the network, certain characteristics appear to be hampering the engagement of some members. The **language barrier** (e.g. English, complexity, EU jargon etc.) stands out as an important (however not the only) factor that limits the engagement of a number of NNs. This circumstance seems not only to apply to the NN’s capacity to produce analyses, reports or inputs to documents produced for EAPN’s work at the European level, but also to the scope of understanding of European policy processes in general (including documents produced by the EAPN), which appears to also have an impact on the attitude towards the necessity/importance of an active involvement in the European policy making process.
* Another important factor is the **difference in interests, motives and areas of specialisation/focus** but certainly also different levels of capacity. These factors are most apparent in the case of EOs whose membership has become a major challenge for EAPN, not only concerning membership engagement but also affecting EAPN’s working structure, funding, up to its mission and goals. The frustration expressed by EOs about their own membership provides reason for serious concern while, in some cases, competition (funding, interests) are a direct obstacle to active engagement.
* The current situation is not satisfying, and may be a consequence of the "one size fits all" approach and the way in which it has been implemented. Big/strong networks often manage more detailed and specific inputs and have the capacity to undertake specific advocacy work, while small/recent networks demand basic training and general approaches, although this is observation cannot be generalised.

**Relation between the Secretariat and members**

A further aspect related to membership engagement is the frustration over an either untransparent or unclear decision-making process which is perceived by many members in most EAPN governing bodies. As regards the relationship between EAPN members and the Secretariat, the following statement was expressed independently by several interviewees and in questionnaires: “EAPN claims to be a member-driven network but it’s not, it’s Secretariat-driven.” However, explanations for this fact appear to be polarised: while the Secretariat attributes this fact to a lack of ownership (or sometimes even unwillingness) to engage, many members perceive the Secretariat to apply a rather top-down approach which, they claim, would limit their engagement.

The questionnaires and interviews have demonstrated that there are many misunderstandings between the Secretariat and members; e.g. while the Secretariat understands some actions as potential support to the members, these perceive them as an interference with their work. This frequent disconnection between “what the Secretariat does” and “what members do” is attributed to differences in expectations, working culture (sometimes interpreted as lack of professionalism), capacities, and in feelings of ownership, as well as to a lack of trust or sometimes even mutual taboos or prejudices.

**Participation and commitment from members**

Participation from members is related to ownership and effectiveness of the EAPN. A number of members see a strong relation between their own engagement in the network and the participation of people experiencing poverty who they perceive not to be sufficiently represented. The stronger EAPN’s focus is on the European Semester process, the more participation from the NNs is required, as the implementation of the agenda occurs at the national level. The challenges for an active participation are related to the lack of time (many members are voluntary-based), the rotation of staff (staff comes and goes and hence, every time structures and procedures have to be re-explained), as well as the weakness of some NNs (they find EAPN difficult to engage with and have difficulties in following the EU agenda). Furthermore, it appears that the rapid process of the network in recent years (new NNs) without the due accompaniment and support has weakened participation and engagement of members. Moreover, the increasing difference in expectations from members and the European Commission (i.e. what EAPN has been asked to do by the European Commission) is an obstacle for participation and engagement.

Improving participation will require more capacity by the Secretariat to support networks, especially in demonstrating results, as today, members feel challenged by the information requested by EAPN and feel that it is not worth the effort. It is important to facilitate members with a good understanding of the EU agenda and to highlight the key issues where energies need to focus on. In order to strengthen this aspect, some of the suggested possibilities could be explored (e.g. twinning, clustering networks, training for new members, working together on projects). It would also be important to pay attention to the format of meetings (some meetings are very formal and their format does not encourage engagement and motivation).

The lack of ownership and accountability from members needs to be tackled at all levels. Members need to know that, if they do not deliver there will be consequences for the NNs and for the entire network. If EAPN wants to be a member-driven organisation, there is a need for more commitment of its members; for instance, some practices (i.e. not presenting annual reports, attending meetings without engaging in them nor following up afterwards) should be avoided.

**The role of European organisations**

Finding an appropriate role of EOs in the EAPN has been always a challenge and matter of concern; according to some interviewees, the distance (even disconnection) between EOs and NNs appears to have grown in recent years. This trend could have been aggravated by a lack of mutual trust, decreasing expectations and increasing misunderstandings. EOs share the same and different interests at the same time, which explains why they may cooperate with the EAPN as full members but compete in some areas. It is worth highlighting that there might be a difference between specialised EOs (children, homeless etc.) and those that are also a network of networks.

Despite these difficulties, there is a common understanding that EOs are indispensable for the EAPN as they provide fundamental added expertise and value for the achievement of its mission. At the same time, EOs also benefit from the EAPN; however, their role needs to be clarified. Furthermore, it is been suggested that the participation of EOs members in (or their cooperation with) National Networks could be strengthened.

## 2.3. Recommendations

**Recommendations**

* In order to integrate and cope with the diversity of its members, EAPN should clearly **distinguish between the work that is essential and the work that brings added value to the network**. All members should engaged in essential work (core activity) while activities that bring added value should offer the possibility for different levels of engagement by members. The cause for working together (leitmotiv) must be clearly identified and be the driver of core activities.
* The **development and support of NNs should become an EAPN priority**. Different forms and options can be explored:
* Strengthening of peer support and mutual learning through twinnings between networks and creating opportunities for alliances between members;
* Fostering the cooperation of some networks under specific projects or thematic issues;
* Clustering members according to similar characteristics (e.g. size, region, affinities, etc.) which could be supported by respective coordinators at the Secretariat who would be responsible for these networks (i.e. more specific membership support provided by the Secretariat).
* Investing more in capacity building for less resourced networks and to help them acquire more resources so that they can participate more actively in the debates and the overall work of EAPN.
* Adjusting forms of implementation of the MASS to the national realities.
* Reintroduction of trainings for new members.
* **Finding an adequate and specific role of European Organisations** in the EAPN, understanding their added value and recognising their space. Creating conditions for more engagement by EOs and for mutual benefits for both sides (benefits from their positions, mutual knowledge and expertise). Finding flexible ways for the participation and/or cooperation of European Organisations in/with the National Networks.
* **Clarifying the role of the Secretariat in its support to members** and strengthening ways of mutual understanding and better cooperation; e.g. help members to better understanding EAPN’s policies and strategies; identify forms to better understand and respond to the needs and demands from NNs; find ways of a more interactive connection with NNs; simplify processes and contents and adapt to them to the network’s diversity (e.g. less information and reader-friendlier, new forms of reporting and communication such as videos, slogans, posters and support the translation into more languages etc.).

# 3. Working with EU Institutions, Stakeholders and Peers

## 3.1. Opinions

**The European Commission (EC)**

In the past, the external work of EAPN has mainly focused on policy action/lobbying with the European Commission. According to many respondents of this evaluation, EAPN has significantly contributed to keeping “poverty and social exclusion” on the EU agenda which is also reflected in its achievement of influencing the adoption of the poverty targets in the EU 2020 Strategy. The mayor strengths of this work are related to good and permanent cooperation and the capacity to influence the EU agenda. Continuity in funding has certainly been a crucial factor for the existence of the EAPN up today.

Critical weaknesses identified by the respondents regarding the work with the European Commission are related to economic dependency, the almost exclusive work with one Directorate-General Direction (DG Employment and Social Affairs), the absence of relations at the political level (Director General, Commissioner) despite increased relations with the Commissioner cabinet, and the conditioned agenda (driven by EC interest and policies).

There is a consensus among interviewees about the change of patrons in EAPN’s relations with the EC. The new relations are characterised by less civil dialogue (less access to relevant units, less frequent dialogue), towards project funding, a change in expectations (results orientation, provision of quantitative data, complementary sources of information, experimentation, etc.). At the same time, financing from the Commission is decreasing and tends to focus on project development rather than on supporting core activities. As a consequence, EAPN has to compete for funds with a growing number of NGOs.

These new trends are not only a consequence of the transition period (new team of Commissioners, new system of financing) but are considered to be a tendency in the mid and long term. It could be said that there is a loss of historical background, when EAPN used to be considered a part of the European social project. EAPN is confounded with other types of networks and sometimes its nature is not well known or recognised; in fact, EAPN was born to reinforce democracy and participation of citizens, under the hat of shaping better governance.

In the opinion of most of participants of this evaluation, in the future, EAPN should broaden its relations with the EC by seeking closer cooperation with other DGs and their bodies. These relations should be based on the areas related to poverty and social exclusion and seek the monitoring and influencing of their policies as well as funding EAPN’s core activities and/or project development. Certainly, these relations should be prioritised according to EAPN’s resources and capabilities. Respondents to the questionnaires insisted on opening up to and increasing relations with DGs working in fields such as: health, transport, housing, justice, education, agriculture, the ones working on the digital agenda (e-participation and e-inclusion) as well as Economic and Financial Affairs (ECFIN),

Some respondents insisted on the fact that EAPN needs to be more confident, have a project and strategy by itself and not only focus its work on the EC. It has been suggested that this should be reflected in the language used by EAPN (often fitting too much into the Commission’s patterns, logics and jargon) which should use its own strong patterns, logics and language. Some opinions stressed that EAPN is not a consulting or advisory body to the Commission but an organisation of people experiencing poverty and their NGOs, with their own agenda, demands, language and expertise.

**The European Parliament (EP)**

Accordant to different opinions, EAPN is increasing its relations and influence with the EP although these are based on individual relations and despite the network’s poor capacity to involve NNs in the lobbying process. “We need to have a stronger follow-up with the EP, more activities and concrete lobbying, using the contacts we made during the campaign for the elections and the PEP meetings,” was one of the opinions expressed in the evaluation. The fact that EAPN is involved in the Spring Alliance is considered not to be enough and EAPN needs to have its own agenda with the EP. One of the mayor challenges identified is the fostering of consistent relations in the long term and not only at individual level (MEPs) but at institutional level.

It was recommended to build more active partnerships by developing concrete actions, attending public hearings and participating in the EP’s commissioned work. It was suggested to keep close track of the EPs activities in order to anticipate and react to potential proposals. This work should be developed together with the NNs and would require developing capacities at both levels.

**The European Council (ECo)**

Respondents have confirmed EAPN’s difficulties in establishing proper relations with the ECo as well as in anticipating and influencing its agenda; until now, most influence has been gained thought the Social Protection Committee but the letters sent to the Council Members did not have any influence. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this work appears to be very poor without the active engagement of NNs despite the fact that EAPN is providing on this task. Some respondents have identified ECOFIN as a potential priority target, as recently, it has been looking at social issues and the social consequences of the crisis.

**Other EU institutions and organisations**

Most of the respondents think that EAPN should seek cooperation with other institutions, such as the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the trade unions for anti-austerity measures, the Committee of the Regions to reach regional decision makers, etc. Nevertheless, others have insisted on the need to prioritise in order to avoid an overload of work and rather focus cooperation on specific targets.

There is a general consensus on the need to foster cooperation with European networks inside the EAPN (EOs) and outside the EAPN (e.g. cooperation with the Social Platform on the Spring Alliance); this cooperation should be based on mutual loyalty and honesty, always following common interests and result in mutual support; nevertheless, some critical voices have argued that, in general terms, previous cooperation has brought little results in the past and it should therefore be taken carefully.

## 3.2. Areas of improvement

According to the answers of the questionnaires as well as interviews, there is a clear message on the need for the EAPN to open up its relations to other EU institutions, notably broader relations to the EC, increase relations with the EP and with the ECo. Furthermore, the need to increase strategic cooperation with other EU bodies and stakeholders has been stressed. Nevertheless, the issue is not only about opening up and increasing relations but also about the purpose, strategy and type of work to develop with these institutions. Moreover, the need for the EAPN to have its own agenda (and not just to follow the EU agenda) has been pointed out. In order to make these suggestions feasible, four potential areas of improvement could be tackled:

**The (type of) relations with the Commission and other EU bodies**

Despite the aforementioned expectations from the European Commission and the new framework, it is a responsibility of the EAPN to remind the European institutions that cooperation with the EAPN is founded on the Article 11 of the Treaty of the European Union and is a genuine expression of participative democracy. European institutions have the duty to *give the representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action and to carry out broad consultation.*

This constructive dialogue and consultation should not only be focused on meeting the demands and expectations from the Commission (providing quantitative data, information, channelling messages, etc.) but rather on listening to the voices and the proposals of the representative organisations; this is especially important when they represent and serve the interests of people experiencing poverty, as is the case of EAPN. As a consequence, the Commission needs to be aware of the special role of the EAPN when providing first hand opinions and information. EAPN should work on potential forms to pass this message to the Commission as it affects the core of its mission and its *raison d’être*.

Following the previous argument, EAPN should actively ask for formal dialogue with the European institutions which cannot be reduced to meetings of the Secretariat with the public servants at the technical level but also need to be held at the policy level with General Directors, Commissioners and the President of the EC.

**Individual and joint interlocution with the EC at the same time**

As mentioned above, in recent years, the EC has intended to simplify and reduce the interlocution with European NGOs; as a consequence, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make EAPN’s voice heard under these circumstances. EAPN is a member of the Social Platform and has as such contributed with knowledge and capacity to the growth and recognition of the Social Platform at European level. Today, European institutions clearly prefer to interact with the Platform on a number of issues in order to avoid having to consult specific NGOs.

This approach to channel all the relations with the social NGOs thought a one single institution is wrong, as it ignores the diversity of networks and their particular expertise. In principle, EAPN must support its actions through cooperation and this is done best by strengthening forces with other European networks and platforms. However, this principle cannot substitute individual dialogue with the Commission, especially in areas where EAPN can provide specific expertise. Therefore, EAPN should review its participation in joint initiatives (including in the Social Platform) from a perspective of strengthening forces, achieving common results, balancing representation and gaining mutual visibility.

**Better alignment between the national and European level:**

The efficiency of relations between the EAPN and European institutions will depend on the adequate and synchronised work of the EAPN both at the European level (Secretariat, Bureau) and at the national level (National Networks). This is not only the case with regards do relations with the ECo, where decisions are taken by the national representatives, but also regarding relations with the EP, as its agenda is being debated at the national level because its members represent national citizens, as well as the EC, as most of its initiatives need to be implemented at national level.

In order to influence European policies and the European decision making process, there is a need for substantial action at the national level that needs to be carried out by NNs. Furthermore, there appears to be substantial learning potential from approaches applied by some NNs (e.g. Spanish, Portuguese). However, this would require accurate support from EAPN (Secretariat) in the form of adequate guidance material. These documents are recommended to be short and focused. In this context, the EUISG could also concentrate part of its work on the follow-up at the national level e.g. by producing tools and support information.

It is been pointed out that many EAPN reports are not used at all by the NNs due to time constraints, budget constraints or a lack of focus of the documents. In order to strengthen the national dimension, it has been suggested to produce an annual report at the same time by all the networks (e.g. 17th of October). Such a report could highlight the main common national concerns and set priorities, which in turn could provide the basis for establishing a future policy focus and link the national with the European level (by following the European Semester).

**Cooperation and competition with others:**

It must be explicitly recognised that EOs working in the social area – some of them being EAPN member, while other not – share common interests and, at the same time, have particular interests. In some cases, this may imply conflictive relations. In order to foster beneficial relations with EOs it is essential for these to be founded on mutual trust, honesty transparency.

Experience demonstrates that, over the years, EAPN has been working successfully with other European NGOs. Needless to say that pushing too hard for individual interests is not helpful for any collaboration and that an effective cooperation should result in a win-win approach. As the Commission is pushing for new patrons of relation and new forms of cooperation with European organisations, this may have positive but certainly also negative effects and it is therefore recommendable for the EAPN to review its current positioning in this new scenario.

## 3.3. Recommendations

Considering the above-described observations, the following recommendations can be made for the future work of the EAPN and its Strategic Plan 2015-2018:

|  |
| --- |
| **Recommendations*** **General strategy:** feeding-in and feeding-out
* Adequate and synchronised work of the EAPN both at the European level (Secretariat, Bureau, EUISG group) and at the national level (National Networks)
* **European institutions:**
* It is recommended for the EAPN to have its own agenda with which it addresses European institutions and avoid the risk of simply following/responding to the EU agenda.
* Seek formal dialogue with European institutions in areas related to poverty and social exclusion and to raise this dialogue to the political level (especially with the EC).
* **European Commission**:
* Increase the work with other DGs based on other dimensions of the poverty agenda, e.g. DG Regio, DG EAC, DG Sanco and DG Justice. These relations could also include seeking new funds for the EAPN.
* **European Parliament:**
* Focus more on the EP and foster consistent relations in the long term, not only at the individual level (MEPs) but also at the institutional level.
* Supporting National Networks in their lobbying with their MEP.
* **European Council**:
* Help National Networks to influence the European Council by providing support and producing simple and focused documents.
* **Cooperation with other institutions**:
* Increase cooperation focused on specific targets and according to means, such as with the ESC (Economic and Social Committee), the FRA, ETUC in order to influence social policies and anti-austerity measures.
* **European networks (members and non-members of EAPN):**
* Foster cooperation based on loyalty and honesty, always following common interest and resulting in mutual support.
* Review EAPN’s participation in joint initiatives (including in the Social Platform) from the perspective of strengthening forces, achieving common results, balancing representation and gaining mutual visibility.
* **Internal implications (Secretariat and EUISG group):**
* It is recommended that EAPN (Secretariat) provides tools that would allow a comparative analysis of policy approaches at national level, as well as guidance material that could strengthen the exchange of best practices.
* It is recommended for the EUSIG group to focus its work on supporting and monitoring the progress of the EU agenda at the national level.
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# 4. Working Structures and Methods

## 4.1. Opinions

**Governing bodies and the decision making process**

Note: Scale1 = not efficient, 5 = very efficient

Based on the questionnaire, members evaluated the functioning of the **General Assembly** with an average score of 2.8 (1=not efficient, 5=very efficient). However, there appears to be very little consensus on this matter as scores show great disparity; notably, no substantial differences between scores awarded by EOs and NNs can be observed. Some respondents insisted that the GA should become, as it used to be for a long time, a real governing body, taking fundamental decisions and not merely a ratifying body. Most respondents are aware of the fact that the current situation does not allow for the GA to be organised as it was in the past; however, they insist on the need to find a space and momentum to share and exchange opinions by changing methodologies. Others stressed that, due to the internal (more members) and external situation (less funds), the entire network’s structure should be redesigned and made sustainable, based on democratic foundations.

The **Executive Committee** received an average score of 2.9. Again, in this area the disparities are high with some score on both extremes of the scale, however, with concentration around the mean value (2, 3, 4); EO scores are in line with NN scores. Several respondents stressed that the EXCO should become a “political” body that would be more engaged in debates and in deciding policies; it has also been pointed out that membership support should be one of the key issues on the agenda. Several answers have appealed for the need to more commitment and permanent engagement by EXCO members as well as for the need to improve preparations of the meetings. For others, the EXCO should also be a forum for the exchange information.

When evaluating the functioning of the **Bureau**, the average score reached 3.1, indicating a higher degree of satisfaction, with the exception of EOs who awarded lower scores. There is a general feeling that the Bureau is overcharged and the number of members should be enlarged, as the work to be developed is too much to be done on a voluntary basis. At the same time, a division of tasks between its members by areas of work has been suggested. Further proposals for improvement relate to a smoothening of communication channels with the EXCO (e.g. monthly newsletter). Several respondents insisted on the need for more decision-making capacity by the Bureau which should go hand in hand with more transparency. Moreover, the necessity to find an appropriate working method was highlighted, as plenaries do not appear to be efficient enough and the division into small groups is not considered satisfactory.

As regards the **decision making process**, most respondents insisted on the need for more clarity about the role and responsibility of each governing body. At the moment, it appears unclear which tasks the different bodies (EXCO, Bureau, Working groups, Secretariat) deal with, what they are responsible for, as well as who takes decisions on certain issues. Some respondents stressed the need for more pragmatism in making concrete proposals (e.g. decision-making should not be linked to a consensus, only to a qualified majority in the EXCO. The “same debate leading to a decision” should not take place in two or more bodies. Once there is an output coming from a working group, the corresponding body should endorse these conclusions as “an EAPN statement”).

Generally speaking, the common understanding is that the GA takes basic decisions, the EXCO makes sure that these decisions are followed, and the Bureau overlooks the correct functioning of the network and can represent it at any given moment at any level and can make swift decisions when and if necessary. It was also suggested that staff with a clearer division of responsibilities and better acknowledgement of the hierarchy (while still being democratic) would enable a clearer and smoother decision-making process. In order to facilitate the Bureau’s political action, it was suggested that the Secretariat could develop more ad-hoc documentation for meetings. Several respondents also highlighted that participation and engagement must find new forms (e.g. electronic platforms, Skype for routine meetings etc.).

**The work of the Secretariat and the quality of outputs**

Note: Scale 1=not useful, 5=very useful

The support of the Secretariat to EAPN members reached an average score 3.3 (1=not useful, 5=very useful); with the exception of two cases, scores were awarded very positively. Moreover, the quality of outputs produced by the Secretariat (e.g. newsletters, website, publications, organisation of events, trainings etc.) is highly appreciated and reached an average score of 4.1 with high consensus among all respondents.

These positive opinions about the quality of outputs was confirmed by interviews, especially external opinions, that consider the EAPN to be a professional organisation that brings the issue of poverty to the political arena which is also reflected in its good reputation due to hard lobby work. Further external opinions confirmed that EAPN is perceived to be very focused (“they are very good at looking at the broader picture and work very focused”), very dynamic, concise and “much more professional than other networks”. Additionally, the organisation of conferences, meetings and events is much appreciated by externals and so is the quality of EAPN’s outputs (“We’ve structured our outputs in a way people easily associate it with us”).

Despite this general positive internal and external feedback, EAPN respondents have pointed out the need to improve the daily functioning and internal organisation of the Secretariat. Some suggestions include: improve cooperation between and coordination of staff members; inform sooner when meetings are organised. Several respondents expressed critical concerns about EAPN’s financial administration (accounting system) highlighted the need for “serious improvement” although no concrete suggestions were made.

Other recommendations are related to the orientation of work: respondents considered it important that the Secretariat supported the Bureau’s political action in a more efficient way, particularly its President. A rebalance of work between “development and members support” and “policy analysis and recommendations for action” was proposed. A clearer commitment was demanded when supporting NNs in co-organising activities. In this context, it was also suggested to use the expertise of members.

Several answers insisted on producing less but more efficient documents that were “easy to read”. Concrete requests asked for “less questionnaires” and suggested to consider the “usefulness of papers produced” (i.e. refrain from adding document extensions, making them reader-friendly and written in an understandable language, avoid repetition of successive documents or, if necessary, highlight changes in newer versions). At the same time, several members (esp. NNs) stressed that many papers and reports were not useful for them as they were “too academic” and many of their members do not understand the European agenda. Furthermore, the need to increase the use of ICTs was stressed, as new technologies would allow smoothening collaboration without compromising the budget.

**Functioning of other EAPN entities**

Scale: 1=not satisfactory, 5=very satisfactory

Most respondents of the questionnaire evaluated the EUISG very positively, with an average score of 3.8 (1 = not satisfactory, 5 = very satisfactory) and a substantial consensus among both NNs and EOs. Similarly, task forces were perceived to do satisfactory work, scoring an average of 3.4. By contrast, the work of the subgroups was less appreciated, with an average score of 2.7.

Several recommendations have been proposed to improve the work and functioning of the **EUISG**: As regard its working contents, several respondents pointed out that its work should focus less on responding to the EU agenda (NRP and EU semester) and concentrated on issues that can have more impact at the national level. The impression is that the EUISG has had an increase of workload, which appears to be difficult to handle; less topics and better prioritisation could improve this situation, it was suggested.

Regarding the **Task Forces**, the general opinion seems to be to reduce their number. It was also suggested to have one or two Task Forces per year, possibly involving a relevant EO (if feasible). Others are of the opinion that Task Forces are too short and are often not linked to EAPN’s strategic goals. Other recommendations for improvement are: better follow-up of the work done; minimum quality standards should be guaranteed for every Task Force output in order to prevent amateurism and weak argumentation (without adequate resources which could guarantee meeting these standards, Task Force should not be implemented).

The general opinion is that **subgroups** should be reviewed, particularly the EXCO subgroups. In general terms, it was suggested to find a simpler way of organising these groups as well as a clearer instrumental objective for them (the work of the subgroups seems to be difficult to implement in the network.)

**Internal Communication**

Communications of EAPN activities to its members is crucial for the effectiveness of its work (adequate interlink between the European, national and local level) and appears to be a critical issue. The enquiry demonstrated that many NNs have difficulties in transferring and communicating the results and commitments of their participation in EAPN activities to their own networks. Due to limited means, time or capacity, many networks limit themselves to minimal actions, such as disseminating short reports after attending an EAPN activity to their members; limited reporting to their respective governing bodies; insufficient presentation of results when they meet; translation of only a selected number of documents they consider of substantial interest (the issue of language seems to be a recurrent problem for many networks).

Some national networks have developed a sophisticated system of bridging the work between the EAPN at European and national level; for example, the Spanish network has created a follow-up group that meets regularly (every two weeks) with an information management system that channels EAPN’s work at the technical level and policy level; the filtered information feeds into the strategy of the national network. Similar systems are applied in Ireland and Portugal. In Romania, the roles for active participation within EAPN are divided between the 5 members of the RENASIS board of directors. After participating in different activities and events, the board members share the information on their participation through the membership mailing list, by posting updates on their website and/or by using social media channels.

## 4.2. Areas of improvement

The orientation to permanent improvement in a given organisational context requires maintaining “what is working well” and improving “what is not working so well”. The external evaluation has demonstrated that many things work well in the EAPN and are also highly appreciated by externals (e.g.: *They are very fast. They have a dynamic network that responds quickly. They are able to organise actions very quickly, dynamic. They are very focused on the poverty issue. They have been able to develop the capacity of their members. They pull each other together. They appear aligned. The members appear to be very engaged.*). These aspects should be kept as the major “capital” of the EAPN in the future

Having said that, all sources consulted for this evaluation indicate that there is a need for substantial improvement in EAPN’s working structures and methods. Many concrete proposals were made along this report, especially in the previous chapter. These suggestions can be complemented by highlighting five points:

**Better consistency of the entire organisational system**

An external view of EAPN’s organisation gives the impression of being the result of accumulated activities that have been added over the time but are not sustainable anymore in the current situation (due to economic constrains), nor efficient as they risk to lose focus, energy and an effective impact. It appears that the entire organisational system needs to be reviewed and adjusted to the current challenges and according to today’s available resources and means.

The conception of governing bodies was made when the EAPN was considerably smaller and therefore, today’s task, responsibilities and working methods would need to be redesigned. The interaction between governing bodies and EAPN activities is not adequate and as a result, the interconnection between the policy and executive level lacks consistency. The same gap is evident between the work of EAPN at central level (Secretariat, Task Forces, subgroups, etc.) and the network’s members (especially the national level). Special attention should be paid to the close cooperation between the EUISG and the EXCO, as well as to how the work of Task Forces and subgroups is channelled from the policy level to the operational level. All in all, the entire organisational system would need to be reviewed according to the goals and objectives to be defined for the next Strategic Plan 2015-2018.

**Setting a focus**

EAPN needs to be realistic and focus on its core mission if it wants to be effective. It is impossible for the level of work to remain the same as in the past, and the same applies to deliverables. It is therefore time to set priorities in order to use the available resources efficiently, consistently and effectively. A critical issue for the future Strategic Plan is to decide whether EAPN’s priority should follow the EU agenda (EU 2020 Strategy and semester process) or think out of the box and include subjects and issues that its members identify as a priority. This decision should also include the question on to what extent these two approaches could be merged? A decision on this option should determine the future working plan, the orientation of the EUISG as well as the adequate selection of the Task Forces.

**Clarifications of the decision-making process**

When reviewing EAPN’s working structures, a clarification of the decision making process is absolutely necessary. The key question to be answered is: “Who decides what?” and “How are decisions are taken?” which should clarify the role of each body in the decision-making process. As has been highlighted earlier, the EAPN needs to find an appropriate decision-making system that balances efficiency and democracy. Decisions need to be democratic and participatory but cannot be delayed for a long time. As mentioned earlier, in some cases, the decision-making process may appear “boring” as the same question is passed to different bodies and becomes and recurring agenda item while other issues are decided without the engagement of the governing bodies.

**Designation and commitment of members**

The designation of members to governing bodies as well as participation in different activities needs to be taken seriously by EAPN as substantial weakness have been reported in some cases. Participants in EAPN’s core activities should guarantee their representativeness and commitment to follow up on decisions and responsibilities at their respective level. It has been reported that some members representing a National Network appear to merely present their personal opinion in EAPN activities instead of representing their network. The selection of the members into groups or bodies should therefore be reviewed and EAPN must ensure that the participating persons are really representing their NN or EO. In other cases, it may occur that some EXCO members are not members of their national boards and therefore do not have the full power or mandate to transfer the results from European-level discussions to their respective National Network.

**Working methods, systems of communication and reporting**

From the questionnaires and interviews it can be concluded that there substantial improvements are necessary with regards to find working methods and dynamic methodologies that engage participants in an more active way; this includes systems of internal communication and reporting which were suggested to be reader-friendlier and more concise. It was proposed that reports could be prepared on new support material (videos, slogans, posters) which could be widely disseminated by all national networks. Furthermore, a more adequate use of e-mails was suggested (e-mail overload) and short videos could be prepared to present the publications. Policy briefings are generally considered to be good reference documents. Some members believe that online meetings and platforms could help to promote a new communication style, while others appear to be more “Internet resistant”. Explanatory policy issues in form of videos for new staff could help bridge the gap between experienced and new members and be an adequate tool for capacity building; these video tools could be stored on an open storage place (server), accessible to all EAPN members.

## 4.3. Recommendations

Considering the above-described observations, the following recommendations can be made for the future work of EAPN and the new Strategic Plan 2015-2018:

**Recommendations**

* Clarify the **decision-making process** (who is responsible for what type of decision?) from a simplification perspective (not all governing bodies should take decisions about the same thing) and guaranteeing transparency (effective communication on the decision taken).
* **Review the continuity of current activities** for the future working plan from the perspective of concentration (focusing on what is essential), consistency (interconnections, synergies and complementarity) and capacity (focus on what is essential and can be afforded with the available resources); reduce and redefine Task Forces and subgroups accordantly. EUISG agenda should be aligned with these principles and act in close cooperation with the EXCO and be closely monitored by it.
* Give **an executive role to the EXCO** by focusing its activity on the policy debate (policy priorities and implementation of the strategy) and on decision-making.
* **Enlarging the number of members of the BUREAU** to facilitate its task of overlooking the correct functioning of the network and permanent representation. The division of tasks (each member focuses on a different area) while keeping joint responsibilities could facilitate its work.
* **Improve the internal communication between EAPN and its networks**: information and communication needs to run smoothly in both directions in order to achieve the desired policy impact.
* **Improve selection of participants** for EAPN governing bodies and activities. Members of governing bodies should be representatives or have the mandate of their respective networks, and people attending activities should be committed to following up their responsibilities at the national level. The adoption of a Code of Conduct is strongly recommended.
* **Strengthen the Secretariat** in order to better balance the advocacy work and support provided to the networks; enhance efficiency of financial management; provide more support to the EXCO and to the President; produce less documents which focus on the needs of the members.
* **Improve systems of communication** and reporting by producing reader-friendlier documents while always thinking about the objective of the output produced: “easy to read” documents (less questionnaires), use of electronic means for meeting (Skype etc.) reporting with visual media, such as videos etc.

# 5. Funding

## 5.1. Opinions

Since its founding, the EAPN has been regularly financed by the DG Employment and Social Affairs while other sources of funding have been the exception. At its beginnings, the European Commission understood that it should finance EAPN’s core activities as it is a major umbrella organization representing people and organisations fighting poverty and social exclusion. The current position of the Commission (DG Employment) has changed in two aspects. Firstly, the budget allocated to EAPN has been drastically reduced. Secondly, the Commission has changed its approach to financing project development rather than providing funds for core and lobbing activities.

The opinions and proposals from EAPN members as regard potential alternative sources of funding were scare in the questionnaire. Most of the respondents are in favour of exploring other sources of funding from **European institutions** (others than DG employment) although proposals are rather vague; only one organisation stressed the position to “concentrate on the 1 million € available from DG EMPL and use it better”. There have been suggestions to explore potential projects from DG Justice (rights), DG Sanco, as well as to conduct researches or participate in human rights and citizenship initiatives. Projects could be presented by EAPN or together with its members.

As regards **private funding,** it seems that recently, EAPN has worked in this field without a long or medium-term strategy but “a bit at random” without a precise strategy. The opinion of most of respondents about seeking private funding is generally positive; however, some great concerns were expressed. While some respondents think that in this regard EAPN should be “more realistic and less purist”, most have asked to be cautious about potential implications and risks (e.g. private companies only if it is in line with EAPN’s mission, vision and goals and only if they respect EAPN’s recommendations and political positions; this option should therefore be very thoroughly analysed beforehand and in case of any doubts be rejected; the reputation of EAPN has more value than funds from any dubious sources; EAPN should not run the risk of becoming a project-oriented organisation for the sake of raising funds). Suggestions for potential alternative donors include the Open Society Foundations, large international donors, EEA funds, GDF (energy poverty), the Tobin tax, or the provision of training as a (external) service. Some European members have pointed out that competition for funding with members should be avoided at all cost.

When members were asked about the main constraints for providing in-kind co-financing for EAPN projects (in order to fulfil the prerequisite established by the EC of 20% co-funding), the reasons varied: lack of capacity of the staff, lack of time, lack of own resources and internal rules. Furthermore, it was stressed that it would be easier for networks to provide co-funding if the Commission accepted voluntary work as co-funding.

## 5.2. Areas of improvement

**Take the problem of funding seriously**

Previous attempts by the EAPN to seek other funding sources (other DGs, other donors) have been scare and have produced poor results. EAPN’s funding situation is an issue of major concern at this moment as it could destroy most of the institutional-building that has been achieved up until now, including the engagement of national members. Although internal reports highlight the problem, the opinion of the evaluators is that EAPN is not aware of the full extent of potential consequences, and that the entire network is not mature enough to tackle this situation. Governing bodies and members of the EAPN should take the funding problem seriously, as its primary responsibility is the sustainability of the network.

**Identify pros and cons of different potential funding sources**

The issue of financing is not black or white, as any external financing will require some conditions. According to the observed trends it is apparent that the Commission will become stronger in dictating the EAPN “what to do and what not do” if the network wants to be financed by it. What is essential and urgent to do at this stage is for the EAPN to identify the pros and cons of different funding sources. For instance, the advantages and disadvantages of running projects need to be identified. In terms of competing with other organisations, the potential results and consequences that contribute to or obstructing the mission of the network need to be identified. The risk of loosing a critical voice as well as other ethical considerations should be weighed against all options.

**Design a long-term strategy**

In organisational development there is a common understanding that one of the most crucial questions for an organisation is its funding strategy. Classical recommendations are that organisations should refrain from depending on a unique funding source in order to avoid dependency and maintain their sustainability. The key question is “where does EAPN want to be in ten years’ time?” and “what is its sustainability model?” The answer will require a comprehensive fundraising strategy based on the diversification of funding sources. Designing this strategy will require time, expertise and patience, as experience has demonstrated that raising private funds does not happen from one day to another and money certainly does not shower but rather drizzles with rather limited effects.

## 5.3. Recommendations

Considering the above-described observations, the following recommendations can be made for the future work of the EAPN and the new Strategic Plan 2015-2018:

**Recommendations**

* Governing bodies and members should **take the problem of EAPN funding seriously as soon as possible,** as their primary responsibility is the sustainability of the network.
* A **fundraising strategy** with a long-term perspective and concrete immediate actions needs to be designed. This strategy should be based on the principle of diversification of funding sources in order to avoid dependency. It should take into account the pros and cons of different funding sources and act accordingly.
* The EAPN should approach different DGs and departments of the European **Commission by following both strategies at the same time**: seeking and arguing for the need of funding for core activities as EAPN is an essential part of the civil dialogue, and seeking funds for specific projects according to its mission and priorities.
* The EAPN should be **prepared for a negative trend** (scenario of uncertainty), advise its members and work on potential alternatives and a risk management plan which should include a worst-case scenario.
* The EAPN could **use the expertise of its members** in the design of fundraising strategies, as there are professionals in many organisations at the national level with long years of experience that can contribute to finding potential alternatives and advice on this process.

# 6. Participation of People Experiencing Poverty

**6.1. Opinions**

EAPN is a network of organisations aimed at combating poverty and social exclusion. At the same time EAPN aims to represent people experiencing poverty, which is reflected in the fact that people who experience(d) poverty or are/were at the risk of poverty participate in EAPN activities or are even members.

The participation of people experiencing poverty is the network’s strength and a well-established and continuous process. EAPN wants to further deepen this participation and to ensure that strong a process continues to form part of its core activities.

EAPN is grounded on the protection of the rights of people at risk of exclusion and to guarantee their effective enjoyment. Nevertheless, it is a challenge to involve people experiencing poverty at all levels. For the last twelve years, EAPN has been holding regular meetings of people experiencing poverty (PeP) which have been a major source of inspiration for its activities. Despite these positive results, some respondents requested a genuine discussion on the future of PeP meetings.

According to the answers of the questionnaires, it can be observed that people experiencing poverty participate in participate in networks at different levels: in many cases, they are part of the network and are in a leading position; they are frequently participate in the most relevant activities (seminars, conferences); they often take part in the advocacy and lobby work; they regularly participate directly in the drafting of the annual working plan; they mostly contribute with volunteer work to the networks. Most networks have special groups with special activities for them.

Different forms for strengthening the direct participation of people experiencing poverty in the EAPN and in its member organisation were suggested. Some members have already put many of them into practice: increasing their participation in the governing bodies; increase their public participation in events (by taking part in public discussions, writing blogs, interviews, sharing their experience and thus helping to shape public opinion); provide specific training (social policy lectures, writing and rhetoric courses and sometimes psychological mentoring). Some respondents suggested that EAPN should make a special effort to make the EU agenda understandable for people experiencing poverty by providing easy-to-read documents, using more visual formats of communication and simplifying information.

**6.2. Areas of improvement**

**Deepen the participation**

According to all opinions, EAPN has substantial progress in the effective involvement of people experiencing poverty. Nevertheless, there is a common feeling that much more could be done in order to deepen their participation at all levels in the network; this would require a permanent process of monitoring in order to facilitate their access to all levels of the organisation and to identify concrete measures to be undertaken in order to make this possible.

**6.3. Recommendations**

Considering the above-described observations, the following recommendations can be made for the future work of the EAPN and the new Strategic Plan 2015-2018:

**Recommendations**

* EAPN should do its best in order to guarantee the financial resources for the celebration of the **annual PEP meeting,** as most members consider it one of the network’s core activities
* **Identify concrete goals for the coming years** that aim to increase the participation of people experiencing poverty at all levels, including concrete measures for making this possible.

# Annexes

**Evaluation Questionnaire**

**EAPN External Evaluation 2014**

**Questionnaire for EAPN Members**

In view of the preparation of its new Strategic Plan, EAPN has contracted an external evaluator to help assess how the current Network is functioning, the relevance of all the structures and the content work, the involvement of members and how it prepares for the next period 2015-2018 in a challenging external environment. This questionnaire consists of 6 sections, including 34 questions to be filled out by National Networks and European Organisations. The questions range in type from scaling (a scale from 1 to 5), prioritising (ranking according to priority) to questions with an open answer. The answers to this questionnaire will provide crucial input for the future planning of EAPN and therefore, all members are strongly encouraged to send in their questionnaires on time. The answers to the questions will be treated anonymously; however, you are kindly asked to provide the name of your Network/Organisation and contact details of the answering person, should any clarifications be needed.

We would kindly like to ask you to send in the filled-out questionnaire to cornelia.rauchberger@fresnoconsulting.es (stating “EAPN external evaluation” in the subject line) by 10 June 2014 the latest.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of Network:** |  |
| **Country:** |  |
| **Contact person** (incl. email and tel nr): |  |
|  |
| **SECTION I: Mission and Goals of EAPN** |
|  |
| **1. What are the key concerns related to poverty in your respective country/area of work?** Please list between 3 to 5 key words (e.g. child poverty, energy poverty, in-work poverty etc.) |
| *Your answer here* |
| **2. What priority (policy) measures are needed to address these key concerns?** Please give between 3 to 5 examples (key words) in each of the 2 sections: |
| **2.a. Measures required at EU level** |
| *Your answer here* |
| **2.b. Measures required at national level** |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **3. How would you evaluate the effectiveness of EAPN’s work on its current mission?** Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5. (1=not effective, 5= very effective)  |
| To promote and enhance the effectiveness of actions against poverty and social exclusion;  | *1-5* |
| To help shape social policies and design action programmes;  | *1-5* |
| To lobby for and with people and groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion. | *1-5* |
| **4. Do you agree with the above EAPN mission statement? Would you rephrase any part of it or suggest including any additional elements for the next programming period?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **5. How relevant are the goals of EAPN’s current Strategic Plan (2012-2014) for the next programming period?** **?** Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5. (1=not relevant, 5= very relevant) |
| A social and sustainable development model that tackles poverty, social exclusion and inequalities is at the heart of decision making in Europe. | *1-5* |
| EAPN is a dynamic, membership driven organisation that is recognised as a key civil society actor fighting poverty, social exclusion and inequalities at National and European levels. | *1-5* |
| People Experiencing Poverty and Social Exclusion recognise EAPN as their Network. | *1-5* |
| **6. Would you rephrase any goal or suggest any other goals?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **SECTION II: MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT** |
|  |
| **7. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences?** Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5. (1=do not agree, 1= fully agree) |
| EAPN provides an opportunity to lobby for my Organisation’s/Network’s/member organisation’s interest at European level | *1-5* |
| EAPN allows my Network/Organisation/member organisations to share views, exchange experiences and/or form alliances with other Organisations/Networks with the same/similar agenda | *1-5* |
| Being a member of the EAPN has a positive impact on the reputation of my Organisation/member organisations | *1-5* |
| The tools and support provided by EAPN strengthen the capacity of my Organisation/my member organisations | *1-5* |
| EAPN tools and support (e.g. publications, events, trainings etc.) help my Network/Organisation to access quality information. | *1-5* |
| Being a member of EAPN increases my Network’s/Organisation’s/member organisations’ funding opportunities. | *1-5* |
|  |
| **8. What would need to change/improve to meet your Network’s/member organisation’s/Organisation’s desired expectations?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **9. What should EAPN’s work focus on in the coming programming period?** Please rank the answers according to priority (1=low priority, 4= high priority) |
| Advocacy at European level, influencing the EU policy making process/EU semester process | *1-4* |
| Promote mutual learning and exchange between member organisations | *1-4* |
| Capacity building for member organisations (e.g. guidance on lobbying at national & European level, European semester process, network building) | *1-4* |
| Bring the voice of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion closer to shaping the EU we want | *1-4* |
|  |
| **10. EAPN’s National Networks vary greatly in size, approaches and engagement. Would you have any advice on how EAPN should deal with this diversity? How could this diversity translate into better member engagement?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **11. Would you have a suggestion on how EAPN could strengthen National Networks?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **12. For those countries implementing the MASS (Membership Assistance and Support Systems):** |
| **12.a.** **What are the challenges in implementing this tool on the four pillars of strong anti-poverty networks** (1 ability to influence governments for better policies, 2 strengthening the participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in internal and external workings, 3 Network development and growth, 4 Good governance and strong internal democracy)**?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
| **12.b. In view of the above, how could EAPN improve its support offered for implementing the MASS?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **13. What areas of EAPN work does your Network/Organisation engage with most and what area would you want to strengthen (policy, communication, development, funding, projects)?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **14. How could the engagement of European Organisations with the EAPN be strengthened? What improvements would you suggest in terms of participation and cooperation?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **SECTION III: WORKING WITH EU INSTITUTIONS, STAKEHOLDERS AND PEERS** |
|  |
| **15. What would you say are the 3 main strengths and weaknesses of EAPN’s work with the following stakeholders?** Please state key words for each institution. |
| **EU institution** | **EAPN strengths** | **EAPN weaknesses** |
| European Commission | *Your answer here* | *Your answer here* |
| European Parliament | *Your answer here* | *Your answer here* |
| European Council | *Your answer here* | *Your answer here* |
| **16. Would you like to make additional comments or suggestions related to EAPN’s work with these actors?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **17. What should be the priorities of EAPN’s work with these institutions? Should EAPN change or refocus its approach with these actors?** Please answer briefly. |
| **EU institution** | **Future EAPN priorities** |
| European Commission | *Your answer here* |
| European Parliament | *Your answer here* |
| European Council | *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **18. Up until now, EAPN’s work with the European Commission has primarily focused on the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion (DG EMPL). In this regard, would you have any suggestions for EAPN’s future work?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **19. Would you suggest any priorities in the cooperation with other EU institutions (e.g. Economic and Social Committee, European agencies etc.) or social partners (e.g. trade unions, entrepreneurs etc.)?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **20. How could EAPN improve its support to your Network in the following (policy) actions?** Open answer (2 sections) |
| **20.a. Influencing policy-making at European level through the European Council (via National Governments)** |
| *Your answer here* |
| **20.b. Monitoring the implementation of European policies at national level (e.g. by critical reporting)** |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **SECTION IV: WORKING STRUCTURES AND METHODS** |
|  |
| **21. How would you evaluate the work of the following EAPN governing bodies?** Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5. (1=not efficient, 5= very efficient) |
| General Assembly | *1-5* |
| Executive Committee | *1-5* |
| Bureau | *1-5* |
| **22. Would you have any suggestions on how to improve the efficiency of these governing bodies (e.g. assignment or clarity of responsibilities, interaction or decision making process etc.)?** Open answer. |
| General Assembly | *Your answer here* |
| Executive Committee | *Your answer here* |
| Bureau | *Your answer here* |
| **23. Would you have a general suggestion on how to improve EAPN’s decision-making process?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **24. How useful is the work of the EAPN Secretariat for your Network/Organisation/member organisations?** Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5. (1=not useful, 5= very useful) |
| Support provided to members | *1-5* |
| Quality of outputs (e.g. newsletters, website, publications, organisation of events, trainings etc.) | *1-5* |
| **25. Would you have any suggestions on how to improve the work of or the engagement with the EAPN Secretariat?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **26. How would you evaluate the work of the following EAPN entities?** Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5. (1=not satisfactory, 5= very satisfactory) |
| EU Inclusion Strategies Group | *1-5* |
| Task forces | *1-5* |
| Subgroups | *1-5* |
| **27. Would you have any suggestions on how to improve the work of these entities?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **28. How does your Network/Organisation communicate internally on the participation in and results from different EAPN working structures and meetings?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **29. How could the EAPN strengthen its cooperation with peer actors such as the Social Platform, European Organisations and other stakeholders? Please comment on the possible complementarity of EAPN’s work, the division of labour, future priorities etc.** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **SECTION V: FUNDING** |
|  |
| **30. Taking into account the increasing difficulties in accessing funding from the European Commission, what could be other funding sources to finance EAPN’s work?** Open answer, 2 sections. |
| **30.a. Funding from other DGs (other than employment) and other European institutions** |
| *Your answer here* |
| **30.b. Other sources** |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **31. What are the main constraints for providing in-kind co-financing for EAPN projects?** Open question. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **SECTION VI: PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY** |
|  |
| **32. How has your Network/Organisation integrated the EU PEP meetings in its advocacy and lobby work?** Open answer. |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **33. What mechanisms of direct participation has your Network/Organisation put in place so that people experiencing poverty and social exclusion feel that EAPN is their network?** Open answer |
| *Your answer here* |
|  |
| **34. How could the EAPN strengthen the direct participation of people experiencing poverty inside EAPN and in its external work?** Open question. |
| *Your answer here* |

**List of interviews and discussion groups**

**EAPN internal**

2014-04-03 Barbara Helfferich (Director)

2014-04-03 Workshop with the EAPN Secretariat

2014-04-04 Fintan Farrel (former Director)

2014-04-30 Carlos Susias (EAPN Spain)

2014-05-05 Sergio Aire (President)

2014-06-27 EXCO World Café

**External** (anonymous)

2014-04-03 DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

2014-04-03 Women’s Lobby

2014-04-04 European Parliament