

EAPN UK Annual Report 2012-13

Introduction

EAPN UK is currently made up on four networks covering the constituent parts of the UK. The four networks are EAPN England, The Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network (NIAPN), Anti-Poverty Network Cymru (APNC- Wales) and the Poverty Alliance (Scotland). The four networks each have their own governance structures, membership, and priorities. We work together through the UK Liaison Group (UKLG) and seek to coordinate on key campaigns and lobbying. This annual report highlights key activities over the last year of one of the constituent parts of the UK network, the Poverty Alliance in Scotland, as well as activities taken together.

UK Context

Like many other parts of the EU, the UK has been experiencing a prolonged period of economic stagnation leading to increased unemployment and falling real incomes. The double dip recession experienced the UK following the financial crisis in 2007-08 has been made worse for many people by the austerity measures that have been pursued by the UK Government since 2010.

A comprehensive analysis of the economic situation in the UK, and its social impact was made for EAPN by Katherine Duffy. This analysis shows that wide ranging cuts have been progressively imposed on almost all parts of the social security system and on the wider welfare state. Changes to the social security system will have a particularly significant impact on disabled people, lone parents and women. Many of the most significant changes are still to be introduced, but changes to Housing Benefit, child benefits, tax credits and others are already having an impact on incomes. Added to this, spending cuts to public services and to the voluntary sector are leading to the closure or restriction in access to services that people on low incomes rely on.

Austerity measures are having a severe impact on individuals living on low incomes, but it has also created a number of challenges for groups and organisations in the UK that form the backbone of the anti-poverty movement. Survival for many smaller organisations is a priority. This means that attention is more focused on securing their future than in further developing their activities in ways that effectively address poverty. Whilst much of the policy rhetoric in the UK is about prevention and early intervention, the reality is that organisations in the voluntary sector who have much to contribution to such approaches are focused on keeping their work going. This focus not only diverts them from developing the innovative solutions needed to help people move out of poverty, but also from campaigning against the policies that will lead to increases in poverty.

Despite these difficult circumstances for anti-poverty organisations some opportunities continue to arise. We have noted the emergence of a number of

Commission's and 'People's Assemblies' that have been looking at poverty and inequality and which have brought together groups from civil society with public bodies to find new solutions and ways of working together to address poverty. There is also a renewed focus in some areas on developing more robust local and regional anti-poverty strategies to oppose UK policies. EAPN members have been actively involved in these initiatives where ever possible. For example, members of EAPN England played a leading role in in the Leicester Child Poverty Commission. Whilst dialogue with the UK Government is at a very low ebb, opportunities do exist at the local and regional level to have a meaningful engagement which can lead to real improvements in conditions for people on low incomes.

We have also seen new campaigns develop in response to some of the austerity measures. The introduction of the so-called 'bedroom tax' (a restriction on benefits based on the number of 'unused' bedrooms) has inspired a great deal of grassroots campaigning. Other aspects of the welfare reform programme have also lead to new campaigns, although many of these are short lived 'guerilla' actions organized through facebook and twitter. Again, EAPN members have been actively involved in these campaigns. Members in England, such as the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre has been centrally involved in campaigning around the role of the French multinational ATOS in the medical assessment of welfare claimants.

EAPN UK has been impacted by the changes that are affecting all parts of the voluntary and community sector. Key organisations that have supported our work have lost funding, closed or have had their attention focused elsewhere. As reported by Katherine Duffy in the UK Fiche, UK Government policy, both economic and social, is not influenced by EU priorities. The opportunities for structured dialogue between the UK Government and EAPN and other NGOs has all but disappeared. Over the last year EAPN UK has continued to seek opportunities to engage (for example, organizing a delegation of organisations to meet with UK Government officials on the development of the NRP in 2012) but our focus has been on maintaining our links as the only UK wide anti-poverty network.

The Poverty Alliance

Background: In 2012 the Poverty Alliance celebrated 20 years as a formally constituted network. During this time we have developed a wide membership base, a strong track record on involving people with direct experience of poverty, and having an impact of anti-poverty policy. Despite facing considerable funding pressures we have managed to maintain levels of both activity and staffing.

In 2012-13 we employed 11 members of staff (8 full time, 3 part time; 5 were on fixed term contracts). We maintained a Board of management, chaired by Jim Boyle of Oxfam Scotland, who met 6 times during the course of the year. The Board of the Alliance contains representatives from grassroots organisations as well as from national organisations such as Child Poverty Action Group, Shelter, Save the Children, One Parent Families Scotland and the Scottish Drugs Forum.

Our key core funders remain the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council. In 2012-13 we entered the final year of the Evidence Participation Change (EPIC) Project, which has supported the employment of 4 full-time staff. The Alliance faces considerable funding challenges in the coming years as core income continues to decline and project funding becomes scarcer.

Key activities: The key activities of the Alliance are divided into 'policy' and 'fieldwork', the latter representing our work with community groups and people with experience of poverty.

Issues around welfare reform have dominated our policy work. Over the course of the last year we have continued to coordinate the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (SCoWR), a coalition of more than 60 civil society organisations that has been lobbying the UK and Scottish Government on the changes that are taking place. This work has included being involved in the Scottish Government Welfare Reform Scrutiny Group, providing written and oral evidence to the Scottish Parliaments' Welfare Reform Committee, and producing briefing papers on Employment and Support Allowance and other issues.

Along with other key members of the SCoWR campaign we lobbied the Scottish Government on the development of the new Scottish Welfare Fund (the replacement of the Social Fund). In addition to securing a number of important concessions on the design of the program we were also able to secure an additional £9million for the first year of the Fund. As part of the development of the new Fund we also produced a video, featuring a number of community activists involved with the Alliance that will be part of training for workers delivering the service.

We continue to coordinate the Scottish Living Wage Campaign, which brings together key trade unions, faith groups and voluntary organisations. A range of activities have been undertaken during the last year, including producing evidence for a number of Parliamentary committees, providing extensive commentary on low pay and living wage issues to the media. We also organized activity as part of the first UK Living Wage Week in November 2012. This included media work, a Parliamentary event, and a roundtable discussion with employers organisations. We have also been lobbying on the development of new procurement legislation in Scotland, including hosting a discussion event involving Scottish Government officials, trade unions, faith groups and legal experts. We will continue to lobby on this legislation over the coming year. The living wage has been an important campaign for the Poverty Alliance, and we now estimate that over 20,000 workers, mostly working in local authorities have received an increase in pay because of the campaign.

In 2011 we launched an anti-stigma campaign, Stick Your Labels, to highlight the impact of stereotypical views of poverty on those who live on low incomes. This campaign received the backing of all the major political parties, and during the last year we have continued to carry out work under its banner. We have worked with a group of community activists to provide training to enable them to more effectively engage with the media. In the course of 2013 we will re-launch the

campaign as part of a wider programme of work designed to address negative attitudes to poverty.

Behind all of our policy and campaign activity is our ongoing fieldwork activity with community and voluntary organisations. This activity can take the form of events and seminars, one to one meetings, training, research, etc. The Alliance maintains an active connection with our grassroots members through a series of individual meetings and visits to grassroots groups. As part of our core activity we carried out 40 such meetings. As part of project work in West Lothian we have engaged with more than 42 meetings focused on welfare changes, engaging with more than 420 individuals. We have also carried out a series of five local seminars focusing on 'poverty myths', reaching more than 130 organisations.

Engagement with grassroots organisations has also been fundamental to a number of policy and research activities. In January 2013 we published a new report, 'Surviving Poverty', the outcome of a participatory research project that worked with lone parents in Fife. This report has been fed into a number of policy processes, including an inquiry into women's employment by the Scottish Parliament. We have also supported work in Dundee and Fife to enable people on low incomes to contribute to local policy development processes. Such community engagement work was also central to the development of the 4th Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty, a two day gathering which brought more than 300 people from diverse background to debate solutions to poverty.

Membership 2012-13:

Full members

AFRESHE	Scottish Drugs Forum
African and Caribbean Network	Scottish Older Peoples Advisory Group
Archibald Foundation	Scottish Refugee Council
ASH Scotland	Scottish Women's Convention
Barnardos	Senscot
Beechwood Women and Arts Group	Sense Scotland
Bridging the Gap	Shelter Scotland
Cambuslang Social Justice Group	South East Kinship Group
	South Lanarkshire Credit Union
Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland	Network
Childrens Panel	Stirling Council (Youth Service)
Christ our King Church	Stroke Matters Inverclyde
Church & Society Council of the Church of Scotland	STUC
	SURF-Scotland's Independent
Citizens Advice Scotland	Regeneration Network
Citizen's Income Trust	Tannochside Information Centre
Clacks Kinship Carers	Tayside Social Inclusion Network
Clydebank Independent Resource Centre	The Iona Community
Community Food and Health (Scotland)	The Larder West Lothian
Community Help & Advice Initiative	The Wise Group
Community North West	Trade Right International
Community Organisation For Race Equality	UMOJA
Community Partnership Team	UNISON Scotland
Conforti Insitute	Voluntary Health Scotland
Consumer Focus Scotland	Western Isles Health Partnership

Destiny Church
Disability West Lothian
Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council
Energy Action Scotland

Friends of Volunteering in Clydesdale
GCVS
Glasgow Association for Mental Health
Glasgow Disability Alliance
Great Little Libraries
Inverclyde Advice & Employment Rights
Inverclyde Homeless Forum
Justice and Peace Scotland
Ladymuir Community House
Moray Against Poverty Network
Moray Disability Forum
North Glasgow Housing Association
North United Communities Limited
One Parent Families Scotland
Oxfam
Parent Action for Safe Play
Pilton Community Health Project
PlanB Money & Debt Advice Support Services
Quarriers
Rutherglen & Cambuslang CAB
Save The Children
Scotland Equality Group
Scottish Borders Council
Scottish Council for Single Homeless

Associate Members

Aberdeen City Council
Addictions Support & Counselling
Cambuslang & Rutherglen Community
Development Trust
CHEX – Community Health Exchange
Dundee City Council
Glasgow General APEX GMB
Inclusion Scotland
INSO
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Karibu Scotland
Kinship Care West Dunbartonshire
Legal Services Agency
New Horizons Border
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde
North Ayrshire Council Social Services
North Lanarkshire Disability Forum
Outside the Box Development Support
Scottish Disability Equality Forum
Space Govanhill
Tea in the Pot
UK Race & Europe Network

In addition, the Poverty Alliance has 61 individual (associate) members.

Future Challenges

EAPN UK has significant challenges for the future. The context outlined above is one where it is increasingly difficult to maintain the infrastructure required to mount effective opposition to policies that are increasing poverty. Added to this, the question of 'Europe' is one that has become increasingly controversial in some parts of the UK and is not immediately associated with the fight against poverty. Discussions have begun within EAPN UK regarding how we address these challenges. Over the course of the coming year we will look to refresh our organizational structure with a view to engaging new organisations and having a bigger impact with limited resources. We will continue to play an active part in EAPNs activity at the European level and to ensure that the learning, experience and solidarity achieved through that activity can be shared with a larger audience of anti-poverty activists in the UK.

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