

Report from EAPN Ireland for 2013

(Lots of pictures available on request!)

Introduction

EAPN Ireland is a membership organisation of community groups working against poverty in Ireland. Staff and volunteers provide effective and targeted support for people experiencing poverty and their organisations in understanding and influencing policy at Irish and EU level. In 2013, this involved:

- A regular and reliable news and information service for community organisations and decision-makers through policy briefings, the monthly newsflash and social media postings
- Clear and well-researched analysis based on the experience of members
- Liaison with Government, Oireachtas (Parliament) and EU, especially the Irish MEPs, the Minister and Department of Social Protection, the European Commission and EAPN (Europe)
- Facilitating dialogue between the community sector and the 'Troika' (IMF, ECB and European Commission) through regular meetings with their formal delegation and day-to-day liaison and information exchange with their secretariats
- Preparing and supporting the Irish delegation to the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty and liaising with the Irish EU Presidency about planning and support for the event
- Leading the Irish Minimum Income Network

1. Influencing National Governments for Better Policies: Advocacy, Lobbying and Policy-Making linked to European Level developments

Much of our policy work is led by the EAPN Ireland Policy Group on the Europe 2020 Strategy, made up of includes Age Action Ireland, Congress Centres Network, Disability Federation of Ireland, Dublin Employment Pact, EAPN Ireland, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, Irish Traveller Movement, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, National Adult Literacy Agency, National Youth Council of Ireland, National Women's Council of Ireland, One Family, OPEN and SIPTU.

Some activities included:

- **Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD):** EAPN Ireland made a detailed submission and worked with the rapporteur, Irish MEP Emer Costello, and the EAPN Europe office (Sian) on the consultation. The report included most of our recommendations. Paul Ginnell spoke at the Dublin consultation along with Commissioner Laszlo Andor.
- **Social Inclusion Forum 2013:** EAPN Ireland and the Community Workers Co-op organised seven local workshops to prepare people experiencing poverty for the Government's Social Inclusion Forum. Robin Hanan presented an agreed summary of conclusions from the regional workshops to the Forum and participants prepared artwork depicting these issues.
- **EAPN/Eurochild/UNICEF seminar on Child Poverty and Child Well-being:** EAPN Ireland helped host this important seminar in Dublin.
- **Dialogue with the "Troika":** EAPN Ireland and the 'Europe 2020 Group' built a relationship with the 'Troika', both through its delegation to Ireland and the European Commission office in Dublin. We met the Troika visiting delegations for every second 'Quarterly Review' and provided briefing and discussed policy with staff in Dublin in between. We concentrated on the impact on the ground of policies on 'activation', training and welfare reform, along with proposals for reform, as also discussed with government.
- **Budget 2014:** EAPN Ireland put considerable effort into engaging members with the annual Budget. This included meetings with Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton TD, engagement with the Department's pre-budget forum and inputs to meetings with the Departments of Finance and

Public Service. We emphasised members' views on welfare reform, pathways to work and impact on poverty, drawing on examples of good and bad practice on the ground. We also discussed these issues with members of the Oireachtas (Parliamentary) Committee on Education and Social Protection.

- **Policy Submissions:** Some policy submissions in 2013, drawn up by the Europe 2020 Group, on the basis of members' knowledge and research, included:
 - To the Department of the Taoiseach: on the Irish National Reform Programme (NRP) 2103 Update to the European Commission on the 5 Europe 2020 targets, including the poverty target.
 - To the Department of Social Protection on the new integrated welfare and employment service INTREO (Social Welfare, FAS Employment Services and Community Welfare Officers Working Together).
 - To the Department of Social Protection and other Departments involved on the implementation of the policy paper *Pathways to Work*.
 - To the Department of Finance on Ireland's 'Partnership Agreement' for the next round of Structural Funds and Rural Development Programme.
 - To the Tax and Welfare Advisory Group on welfare to work issues.
 - To the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.
 - To the European Commission and the Irish Government on the Social Investment Package (SIP).
 - European Social Fund: EAPN Ireland prepared a briefing for the Community sector in Ireland, organized a small workshop on the new round of funding and made several submissions to the Department of Education and Skills on the ESF Partnership Agreement.
 - National Social Report and Europe 2020: We supplied briefing for Irish National Expert for her report on Ireland
- **European Minimum Income Network:** EAPN Ireland is lead partner in the Irish network.
- **Climate Change:** We contributed to a Community Workers Co-op paper on Climate Change and Robin Hanan spoke at a Parliamentary briefing.
- **Other presentations, speeches and initiatives**
 - At the request of the Oireachtas (Parliamentary) Committee on Education and Social Protection, Paul Ginnell and Robin Hanan made a presentation on issues facing people in poverty in Ireland and proposed 'six steps to a more inclusive Ireland'. This led to an extended discussion on ways in which the Committee can contribute to developing a comprehensive strategy against poverty.
 - Paul Ginnell made an input to the Department of Social Protection consultation on Employment Supports on 18th Feb.
 - Robin Hanan made an input to a briefing and discussion session with the Bureau of the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.
 - Robin Hanan spoke at the first European conference on LGBT poverty in Dublin.
 - Our Chairperson Philip O'Connor and EAPN Ireland staff supported the planning group for the UN Cities Against Poverty conference in Dublin on 20-21 February.
 - EAPN Ireland worked with IMPACT and SIPTU to promote the Citizens Initiative on access to quality water.

- Robin Hanan spoke on European Social Policy at three *Wheel* and European Parliament regional conferences in between July and November and also on Europe 2020 and opportunities for engagement at Sligo Community Forum.
- He also spoke on responses to poverty across Europe for Oxfam Ireland; on the work of anti-poverty networks in Europe, for social and community development students, as part of a lecture series run in Limerick by CREATE (Creative Activity for Everyone) and in the Irish National Anti Poverty Strategy, for a delegation from the University of Chicago.
- **Liaison with Social Inclusion Division, Department of Social Protection:** A delegation from the EAPN Ireland Europe 2020 Group met this Division and the new head of the Europe/International Division. This is to be the first of a regular series of meetings. We also work closely with this Division on social impact assessment, the European Meetings of People experiencing Poverty, the Social Inclusion Forum and many other areas.

2. Participation of People Experiencing Poverty and Social Exclusion in Internal and External Workings of the National Network

For the 12th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty and Social Exclusion, EAPN Ireland had a dual role of preparing and supporting the Irish delegation and liaising between EAPN (Europe) and the Irish Presidency officials.

For Irish delegates, much of the value of the preparation and follow-up lies in the involvement of local community groups in preparing materials and messages to bring to the meeting and bringing learning from the meeting back to those communities.

The four Irish delegates, with support from EAPN Ireland, prepared detailed displays on issues facing their communities and how they handled them for display in the tent.

We also organised a discussion between the Irish delegates and decision makers attended by 6 Irish MEPs, a Minister for State, 3 Department of Social Protection officials, 3 European Commission officials and the Irish (later elected European) Ombudsman.

The Irish delegates were:

- Joanne McCabe, Focus Ireland & Peter McVerry Trust;
- Ann O'Connor Longford Community Network;
- Maureen Ward, Irish & Offaly Travellers Movement;
- Mariaam Bhatti, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland.

All four have remained active in EAPN Ireland and two have attended European meetings on our behalf.

3. Development and Growth of the Network (including growth and training and capacity building actions)

Training work includes the workshops before the Social Inclusion Forum, discussed in the previous section, on Irish and European policy on poverty.

A Conference on 40 years of Ireland and European Social Policy was organised with the support of the European Parliament Office in Ireland, attended by community organisations, government departments and academics. Under the general themes of 'looking back and looking forward', this seminar discussed the issues around the establishment of the Poverty Programmes in the 1970s and their legacy in community development since, the debate on equal pay in the 1970s and the issues for poverty and for social inclusion in the coming years.

Our information work includes:

- **EAPN Ireland NewsFlash:** Building on the EAPN Europe newsflash, the format has been redesigned in response to readers' feedback. It now covers Irish and European news, links to blogs and news reports of interest. We have edited the subscription lists and have more than 1,500 subscriptions from

community groups and activists, politicians, policy-makers and journalists. A new PDF version of the News Flash is now uploaded onto our website. This allows for further distribution via social media.

- **Website:** The EAPN Ireland website provides a hub for information and analysis on social policy developments in Ireland and in the European Union. And is the point of reference for much of our social media work. The site attracts between 3,000 and 4,000 unique visitors every month.
- **The EAPN Ireland Facebook page** now has 1,407 'likes', up 79% in two years. The **Twitter feed** has 2,087 followers, up 139% from two years ago.
- EAPN Ireland continued to maintain a modest but consistent **media profile**, with interviews for RTE's Morning Ireland, Drivetime and News programmes, interventions on Prime Time and several local radio stations, as well as coverage in national newspapers.
- **Oireachtas Brief:** With the project partners, the Wheel, EAPN Ireland continued to oversee the development and publication of this information source on political debates and developments.
- **Networking and Alliances:** EAPN Ireland acted as Secretariat for the Community Platform, which groups most national equality and social inclusion organisations. We are also represented on the Steering Group of the Equality and Rights Alliance (ERA) and continue to actively contribute to European Network against Racism, Ireland; the 17 October Committee (UN Day Against Poverty), the Social Policy Network and the Community Employer's Forum.

4. Governance and Internal Democracy (including internal governance, respect of statutory requirements, management in the network and funding).

EAPN Ireland has a wide ranging membership which includes local, regional and national organisations concerned with the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Other stakeholders, including individuals, academics, political actors and state actors, have joined the network as associate members, without voting rights.

At the end of June 2013 EAPN Ireland had 224 paid up members across Ireland, despite losing members through closure of organisations due to the recession and funding cuts.

EAPN Ireland is governed by an Annual General Meeting which elects the Board. The Board in turn elects officers who oversee the day to day management of the organisation.

In 2013 EAPN Ireland continued to refine its strategic and operational plans to deal with the challenges of reduced resources and new environments.

EAPN Ireland receives core funding from the Department of Environment and Local Government's Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector.

The staff during this period was Robin Hanan (Director), Paul Ginnell (Policy Officer) and Maureen Gondipon as Finance and Administrator.

The EAPN Ireland Board was: Ann Irwin, Community Workers Coop ; Anna Visser (Treasurer), Migrant Rights Centre, Ireland ; Kay Lynch (Coordinator, PEP Meeting), Northside Community Law Centre; Lorraine Mulligan, (Vice Chair), SIPTU; Patrick Burke, Youth Work Ireland; Philip O'Connor , Chairperson; Sheila Simmons, Irish Association of Older People ; Tess Murphy, Longford Women's Link; Farai Calvin Jeyacheya , Zimbabwe Heritage Trust.

Members on EAPN Europe structures included:

- Tess Murphy, Longford Women's Link, on the Executive Committee
- Paul Ginnell on the Social Inclusion Working Group, also a member of its steering group
- Robin Hanan as Coordinator of the Irish Delegation to the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty
- Tess Murphy and Rory Nolan (INOUE) at the 'Learning Forum'.