



THE EU STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION: MAKING IT WORK AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

FINAL DECLARATION

On 28 February and 1 March 2003, EURO CITIES and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) held a Conference in Athens, hosted by the City of Athens and under the patronage of Ms Diamantopoulou, Member of the European Commission, on the theme "The EU Strategy for social inclusion: making it work at the local level". The Conference brought together representatives from local authorities, NGOs, national and European institutions and other actors involved in the fight against poverty and called for a greater involvement of the actors at the local level in the Strategy.

EURO CITIES and **EAPN** acknowledge the importance of the steps taken by the European Council of Lisbon in March 2000, when the Heads of States and Governments agreed to "make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010" through adopting an EU strategy for social inclusion based on an Open Method of Coordination (OMC) combining common objectives, National Action Plans and a European programme to encourage cooperation in this field. **EURO CITIES** and **EAPN** also welcome efforts made by Member States to translate the challenges set at European level into concrete terms by developing and implementing National Action Plans on social inclusion.

EURO CITIES, as a network representing the local authorities of over 100 major cities across the EU, EFTA countries, Central and Eastern Europe, and the **European Anti-Poverty Network**, which brings together national, regional and local networks of non-governmental organisations and European Organisations working with and for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the EU, have come together to evaluate the extent to which the EU strategy for social inclusion translates into concrete actions at the local level, involving local authorities and NGOs as major players in working towards the important goal of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010. This event comes at a key moment in the development of the Strategy. The EU Member States are currently developing a second National Action Plan on social inclusion to cover the period July 2003-July 2005. From the experience of the first round of National Action Plans, it is clear that much more needs to be done to effectively involve the local level directly in the process in order to develop integrated national and local action plans which could effectively translate at the local level the objectives of the overall EU strategy.

EURO CITIES and **EAPN** are concerned about the growing levels of poverty, exclusion and inequalities in the European Union. In light of the development of new National Action Plans, the evaluation of the first round of Plans, the debate on the Future of Europe and the enlargement of the European Union, **EURO CITIES** and **EAPN** call on decision makers at local, national and European level to ensure that the agreed objectives for the European Union Social Inclusion Strategy are the basis for concerted actions at all levels to eradicate poverty and exclusion in the European Union. The strategy should translate into effective policy and practice at all levels guaranteeing that:

- Actions are developed and implemented that will **make a positive difference to the lives of the millions of people who are living in the European Union and that are carrying the burden of the failure of our society to eradicate poverty and exclusion.**
- The design, funding and practice of all policy measures including economic, employment and social policy measures at the local, national and European level are oriented towards **the access by all to resources, rights, goods and services.**

- **Social inclusion is mainstreamed** across all policy areas at local, national and European level in order to effectively address the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion.
- Increased efforts are made at all levels to ensure that there is **a greater awareness and understanding of the strategy** among all relevant actors and the general public and that particular efforts are made to engage elected political representatives with the strategy.
- **Budgetary commitments** are made at the local, national and European level to allow for the effective implementation of the measures included in local and national plans and that the contribution of Structural Funds, in particular the European Social Fund (including the Urban and Equal initiatives) provides effective support for local and regional initiatives addressing poverty and exclusion.

While acknowledging and respecting the specificities and competences of each different level in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, EAPN and EURO CITIES urge authorities/ministries, politicians at the corresponding level and European institutions to take action to ensure that:

At the local level

- Local Action Plans on social inclusion are developed or strengthened by the local public authorities, involving other relevant actors including NGOs. Where appropriate, regional action plans would also be developed.
- Objective 4 of the EU strategy on the mobilization of all relevant actors, including NGOs, is effectively translated into practice at the local level, in the development, implementation and assessment of local policies to fight poverty and social exclusion.
- People experiencing poverty and their organisations are involved in the framing, implementing and evaluating of actions at the local level
- Local authorities and other local actors including NGOs allocate time and resources to engage with national and European level strategies to promote social inclusion.

At the National level

- The National Action Plans on social inclusion provide for a clear articulation of policy formulation and delivery between the national, regional and local levels. An integrated and coordinated approach between all levels, with the effective involvement of local actors in the design of the National Action Plans, including in the definition of targets, is fundamental if the plans are to have an effective impact on the lives of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.
- A bottom-up approach is prioritized, which supports the work already being implemented at the local level by local authorities and NGOs in combating social exclusion and which takes this into account when designing the National Action Plan.
- A clear consultation structure is developed for directly involving local authorities and NGOs in the design of the National Action Plans, taking into account the need for sufficient time, procedures and resources for the local level to have a real input. This includes the organisation of consultation meetings with the participation of the ministry/ies responsible for the Plan, local authority representatives (including elected members, policy makers and Social Service Directors) and NGOs, that enable local actors to have a direct input into the design of the Plan.
- The use of Partnership Agreements between the national and local authorities is considered, as a means for providing a clear framework for the development of integrated national and local action plans for social inclusion in line with the objectives of the European strategy. These agreements would enable the joint setting of objectives, targets, and measures, as well as the definition of roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved and the allocation of resources to implement agreed measures.

- Objective 4 is effectively implemented by supporting capacity building initiatives at the local level. It is important to recognise that the involvement of local actors, both in the design of the national and local strategies for social inclusion, takes time, the building of trust between the various actors and resources.

At the European level

- Local actions to fight poverty and social exclusion are monitored and highlighted. The Peer Review process should address specific measures relating to the governance of the Plans, including the ownership and direct involvement of the local level in the European strategy.
- The implementation of Objective 4 of the EU Strategy, and specifically the involvement of the local level in the National Action Plans, is effectively monitored and evaluated by the European Commission in its assessment of the plans and the overall Strategy.
- In the overall strategy components, local authorities and NGOs are called upon to provide input on the development of indicators and on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy
- The local dimension of the fight against social exclusion is adequately addressed in the accession negotiations and in particular in the development of the Joint Inclusion Memoranda in the candidate countries to the EU.

EAPN and EUROCITIES will contribute to achieving these outcomes through:

- continuing to be actively engaged with all the aspects of the strategy, including their development, monitoring and implementation;
- sharing experiences gained through their members;
- working jointly to strengthen and complement their actions in the fight against poverty and social exclusion;
- engagement with other relevant actors;
- the promotion of awareness at the local level of the strategy and the National Action Plans;
- raising awareness of the concerns mentioned above with contacts in the candidate countries.

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