



EAPN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2003 – FINAL DECLARATION

Local Actions in the Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion

On 20-22 November 2003, EAPN held its fourteenth General Assembly in Lille, France. This year the key note theme was: “Local Actions in the fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion”. This General Assembly welcomed the Bulgarian Anti Poverty Network as the first member from a candidate/acceding country to join EAPN. At the end of the General Assembly, the EAPN delegates adopted the following declaration.

EAPN in its assessment of the second round of National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (2003-2005) noted that the EU Inclusion strategy had in just three years of existence developed as a very important tool for mobilisation, information and the sharing of experiences in the combat of poverty and social exclusion across the EU Member States. EAPN noted that the implementation of the strategy is not ambitious enough, and still falls a long way short of the strategies and resources needed to make “*a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and exclusion by the year 2010*” as promised by Heads of State and Government at the Lisbon Council in 2000. Failure to reflect this reality in the Joint Inclusion Report would be to fail the 60 million plus women, men and children in the EU who daily face the harsh realities of poverty and exclusion.

EAPN’s assessment of the plans noted, in some Member States, some improvement in relation to participation, and engagement of local and regional levels in the preparation of the second round of Plans. The lack of this engagement was one of the reasons for the lack of impact of many of the first Plans. Although this process is still at an early stage and even if it is still too much a top down process, EAPN welcomes this involvement of the local level as a step forward, but it is not enough. EAPN is keen to work with other relevant actors to ensure that the local and regional dimension is further developed in the coming period.

EAPN calls for better balance between the social inclusion, employment and economic dimensions of EU policies and practices. This is crucial for the future of social cohesion in an enlarged European Union. Regional, National, EU and International policies must respond to this challenge and create favorable conditions for eradicating poverty and social exclusion. This is essential if local actions are to be successful in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. To achieve this:

Governments and Public Authorities must ensure:

- That the Inter-Governmental Conference safeguards the progress made in the draft Constitution produced by the work of the Convention and that the horizontal clauses in part three of the draft constitution are amended to include the ‘combat of social exclusion’.
- National Government policies must ensure that strong universal social protection frameworks ensure the realization to economic, social and cultural rights for all and the access for all to social services of

quality, including a decent income for all. Decentralisation of powers must be used to extend not weaken universal social protection systems.

- Social inclusion must be mainstreamed across all policy areas at local, national and European level in order to effectively address the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion including the preparation and implementation of the National Action Plans for Employment
- Empowerment and Capacity Building are needed to ensure the mobilization of all relevant actors, including NGOs, is effectively translated into practice at all levels, in the development, implementation and assessment of policies and actions to fight poverty and social exclusion.
- Politicians must ensure adequate resources are collected, to avoid social protection systems being at risk, and to enable actions to be taken to improve these systems where their level is below or inferior to EU Member State best practices.

Participation must be recognised as a Right:

- Participative planning processes are needed and there should be a right to participation.
- The roles of NGOs, including as service providers, as innovators, as a voice in decision making, in citizens' mobilization, in strengthening civil society, in creating a social identity, and in mobilizing people experiencing poverty and social exclusion for participation must be recognized. Clear consultative status is needed.
- Clear principles, frameworks and resources must be put in place to enable NGOs to play these roles in such a way as not to undermine the integrity of public services by encouraging privatisation.
- Local actions in the fight against poverty and social exclusion should be better funded.
- There is need for better structures allowing people experiencing poverty and their organisations to play a central role in the framing, implementing and evaluating of actions to combat poverty and social exclusion.
- These processes of participation have to be inclusive themselves and provide equal opportunity to ensure that the voice of the most vulnerable groups, are heard.

Tools and resources for the Sharing of Experiences must be developed:

- There is a need for greater awareness of the diverse experiences and causes of poverty and exclusion. The specific characteristics faced by those living in rural areas (including issues to do with agriculture and fisheries) requires specific responses. The problems in urban areas and in neighbourhoods with special needs also requires specific responses to be implemented to address this reality. New challenges that will emerge in the light of enlargement will need specific responses.
- There is a need for improved tools and resources to enable actors at the local level to share experiences of successful practices of addressing poverty and social exclusion at the local level. The Peer Review component of the EU Inclusion strategy should provide opportunities to meet this objective.
- There is a need for qualitative targets and indicators alongside quantitative targets and indicators to ensure that all aspects of poverty and social exclusion are addressed. People experiencing poverty and social exclusion through their organisations need to be involved in the definition and assessment of these targets and indicators. EAPN should play a particular role in this regard-. National governments need to set up clear structures, with dedicated resources, to enable this approach to targets and indicators to be achieved.

Discrimination as a cause of poverty and social exclusion must be addressed:

- There is a need for a greater awareness of the specific aspects of poverty and social exclusion experienced by women, who are still to a large extent excluded from decision making processes, are at higher risks of income poverty and are carrying the biggest part of unpaid work, most of it related to care activities
- There is also a need for a greater awareness of the specific aspects of poverty and social exclusion experienced by ethnic minorities, third country nationals, asylum seekers and refugees. These groups often have difficulties to access essential services, are unemployed or are in low paid and precarious work situations.
- The EU attitude towards migration is security and police driven. Immigration is perceived as a problem. On the contrary a European policy likely to put the individual at the centre of society and likely to positively manage the flows of people is needed. Human beings should be considered as a richness. Fundamental rights must be respected by immigration policy (refugees, workers). Migration policies should be integrated in the whole framework of economic, education and cultural policies.
- Positive actions need to be funded in order to address the legacy of discrimination.

The EU Structural Funds:

- Poverty proofing and the gathering of data in relation to the impact of structural funds spending on poverty and social exclusion must be highlighted as a priority in the mid term review of Structural Funds.
- The potential of Technical Assistance within EU Structural Funds must be utilised to strengthen the capacity of NGOs representing the interest of those experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequalities to engage with the Structural Funds process at local, regional and national levels. Structural Funds should be more open to basic (local) action groups to enable them to develop new possibilities to (re-)create the human capital.
- The EU initiatives URBAN and Equal must be assessed for their real ability to contribute to meeting the EU objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and also be embedded in the mainstream Structural Funds.
- Local Social Capital and Capacity Building funding in the EU Structural Funds should be increased and used to empower communities experiencing poverty and exclusion to provide local actions that address locally-defined needs
- The Performance Reserve allocations resulting from the Mid Term Review of Structural Funds should prioritise initiatives to combat social exclusion in recognition of the commitment by Member States under the 1st and 2nd NAPs Inclusion.

EAPN through its members will continue to play an active part in contributing to the fight against poverty and social exclusion and to supporting the EU Inclusion strategy. The assessment of the EU Inclusion strategy (planned in the framework of streamlining) must focus on the potential of the strategy to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010 and propose ways to strengthen the strategy to ensure that it can meet this target.

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