

Network news



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Editorial

An enlarged social Europe for all?

The enlargement of the European Union will bring huge changes and challenges that will continue to be discussed at various levels in the coming months and years. The realities of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are mostly absent in these discussions. The situation as portrayed in this issue of Network News deserves however to get the outmost attention.

From the official side, Joint Inclusion Memoranda (JIMs) that give an overview on the social situation in each of the new Member States have been jointly published by the Commission and the national governments in December last year.

The gap between the data of the JIMs and the social reality in many of the countries shows the limits of the currently used Eurostat figures. Taking 60% of the median income as the poverty threshold in a country where income is generally very low leads to an official poverty rate that is below that of the current EU 15 and can hardly do justice to the reality of poverty and social exclusion in these countries.

Beside this, the outcome of the JIMs underlines the urgent need for a process that enforces social policy strategies such as the National Action Plans on Inclusion while at the same time reforming economic and financial policies. Guaranteeing social justice and access to fundamental rights to all inhabitants of the enlarged EU certainly would be a better political option than what has received political attention, for example setting barriers to the mobility of workers, which could lead to two classes of EU citizens.

Michaela Moser
Coordinator of the EAPN Task force on Enlargement

SPECIAL EDITION EU ENLARGEMENT

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A growing Union, of growing disparities

The accession of ten new Member states to the European Union on 1 May 2004 is one of the most challenging processes the Union has had to face since its creation.

In order to join the Union, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and Slovenia have had to fulfil the economic and political conditions known as the 'Copenhagen criteria', according to which they must be a stable democracy, respecting human rights, the rule of law, and the protection of minorities; have a functioning market economy and adopt the common rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law.

Such an enlargement must be seen as a success for the European Union, in terms of its symbolic value of overcoming the division of the European continent, but also as a move towards better recognition of the need to address key issues of concern to the people in a concerted manner across Europe.

Facing up to the challenge

The European institutions and the current and future Member states have been working hard at ensuring that the Union can adequately address the challenge to its structures and policies of such a huge enlargement. The process of drafting a Constitution, the definition of a new financial perspective and a framework for the future cohesion policy of the Union, the acceleration in integrating the new countries into existing policy frameworks, have all meant a lot of energy and commitment on behalf of all parts. This can be seen as a sign that enlargement to these countries is overall approached as a much awaited opportunity.

At the same time, some trends have emerged during the accession period, which seem to indicate that this particular enlargement of the EU is also seen as a "threat" by some. In particular

concerns around possible migration flows, the establishment of long transition periods for the free movement of workers, and the expressions of discrimination towards minorities in the new countries that have appeared in the media in some countries are just some examples of this negative reaction to enlargement.

The reality is that the European Union of 25 cannot afford to become a fortress within its own boundaries. Efforts must now concentrate on building a stronger unity from within, which would give paramount importance to guaranteeing social justice and access to fundamental rights to all its inhabitants, including the 68 million people who will be living in poverty and social exclusion within it. The EU must live up to its commitment of eradicating poverty and promoting social cohesion throughout its territory, and of accepting and addressing the reality that this cannot be achieved solely through economic growth.

The European Union of 25 cannot afford to become a fortress within its own boundaries

Bridging the gap between growth and cohesion

EAPN has much welcomed the application of the EU social inclusion strategy throughout the 25 Member States, ahead of the accession date, as a way

of responding to this commitment. The drawing up of the Joint Inclusion Memoranda (JIMs) in 2003 - preparatory documents to the National Action Plans - has helped to inform on the high levels of poverty and social exclusion in the new Member states and has highlighted the importance of tackling these issues.

The risk of poverty, as measured by relative income, is lower in the acceding countries (13%) compared to the existing Member States (15%), but the much lower overall levels of national income mean that large sections of the population live on very low incomes and experience high levels of exclusion. An overview of all the JIMs shows that the categories most at risk of poverty are the unemployed, children and young

History of enlargement

The Treaty of Paris (1951), establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the Treaty of Rome (1957), establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), were signed by six founding members: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

The EU then underwent four successive enlargements:

- 1973: Denmark, Ireland and the UK
- 1981: Greece
- 1986: Portugal and Spain
- 1995: Austria, Finland and Sweden

The fifth enlargement (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) which will take place on 1 May 2004 is without precedent in terms of scope: the number of countries (10), the area (increase of 23%) and population (increase of 74 million).

Bulgaria and Romania hope to join the EU by 2007, while Turkey has requested negotiations on its membership to begin.



people, families with three and more children, and lone parent families. The average unemployment rate is high at 14.3% compared to 8% in EU 15 and is especially serious in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Slovak Republic. Long-term unemployment, which usually has a strong correlation to high levels of deprivation, is 8% compared to the EU15's 3% and is especially high in the Slovak Republic, Poland and Lithuania. Life expectancy at birth is significantly lower in most acceding countries than in the EU 15, especially for men whose life expectancy after birth is 5 years less than in EU 15. Also studies reveal that more people feel excluded and left out of society. The JIMs also reveal that, for many, access to basic services such as health and social services is often inadequate.

The JIMs pinpoint the following challenges to be addressed: to increase the labour market participation, to improve education and lifelong learning, to reform social protection systems, to improve access to health, social services and decent housing and supporting families and protecting the rights of children. Moreover, there is a need to urgently address issues of concentration of disadvantage and social segregation in particular areas, as well as the promotion of the inclusion of Roma and ethnic minorities.

Reflecting the reality of poverty

EAPN, through its contacts in the new Member States has gathered information on the level of participation of NGOs and people experiencing poverty in the process of drawing up the Joint Inclusion Memoranda. Overall, the assessment is not very positive and much remains to be done to ensure that the social inclusion strategy does not become a purely administrative process, or a bureaucratic exercise. Awareness raising of the strategy needs to be reinforced and clear and structured participation of other actors must be guaranteed.

In terms of contents, NGOs in the new Member States view the JIMs as a very positive initiative, which has helped to measure and assess the challenges of poverty and exclusion. But they also highlight the flaws in this process that they wish to see corrected as the strategy is adopted fully and National Action Plans are produced in these countries - the first round being completed by July 2004. In particular, they wish to see the Plans address the *reality of poverty*, not just in terms of figures but particularly as a multi-dimensional issue and as denial of fundamental rights. Data and statistics were particularly criticized as not reflecting the reality on the ground.

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Moreover, it is hoped that the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion will help better coordinate social, economic and employment policies in the future and address issues of the growing gap between rich and poor and of the growing inadequacy of existing social protection measures.

NGOs look forward to the opportunity of engaging in the more strategic development of the new Member States' National Action Plans. They hope these Plans will provide a *tool* and not just an assessment in the fight against poverty and exclusion, which should involve developing better mechanisms of policy implementation and evaluation. Further support and resourcing for NGOs is needed to pursue their activities while also assisting them in developing networks representing the interests of people experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequalities. Such networks could engage in a structured way in defining policies to fight poverty and social exclusion, and could link into existing structures at European level, such as EAPN Supporting this happening is fundamental.

Patrizia Brandellero
EAPN Policy and Development officer



Kunda, Estonia – Photo: World Bank

COMMON OUTLINE FOR THE NAPS INCLUSION

The new Member States must submit their first National Action Plans on Social Inclusion by July 2004. The common outline for these NAPS - adopted by the EU Social Protection Committee - follows closely the structure used by existing Member States when preparing their NAPS in 2003:

- Major trends and challenges: major trends, key immediate and long-term risk factors and main groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion;
- Strategic approach, main objectives and key targets, including long-term objectives for the eradication of poverty and social exclusion;
- Policy measures which the new Member States intend to implement over the two-year period, with commitments in term of resources;
- Institutional arrangements: description and assessment of the process followed to develop the NAP, in particular how all actors (including social partners and NGOs) were involved;
- Good practice: presentation of a few (not more than four) examples of good practice drawn from policy measures or institutional arrangements.

The Latvian Memorandum under review

Ten new Commissioners

From 1 May, the following ten new Commissioners will be integrated into the College:

- Markos Kyprianou (Cyprus)
- Pavel Telicka (Czech Republic)
- Siim Kallas (Estonia)
- Péter Balázs (Hungary)
- Sandra Kalniete (Latvia)
- Dalia Grybauskaitė (Lithuania)
- Joe Borg (Malta)
- Danuta Hübner (Poland)
- Ján Figel (Slovakia)
- Janez Potocnik (Slovenia)

They will not have specific portfolios. Instead they will be twinned with current members of the College in their work, for the period from 1 May to 31 October. On 1 November, when a new Commission will be starting its mandate, all newcomers should be re-nominated by their respective countries.

Many issues had to be seriously examined during the development of the Latvian Joint Inclusion Memorandum.

At a time when the National Action Plan on social inclusion for Latvia is being developed, it is important to clarify and assess some of the most difficult points and questions raised by the Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM).

In the Latvian JIM, the analysis of the situation with regard to poverty and social exclusion gives a general overview, but also raises some questions. In particular, the use of data is controversial, and although some of the data are correct, because they are shown separately and out of the general economic and social context, they do not reflect the real situation nor the nature of some problems. An example is the data on the increase of pensioners and employee incomes due to inflation, which in fact does not translate into a real improvement of living standards for these groups.

Some of the data provided should be analysed more broadly and from different points of view. For example, why are some long-term unemployed groups in this situation for such a long period? Correct data, analysed from all points of view, would help to show the nature of each problem and to choose appropriate methods for solving them. Different actors must be involved in the process of data collection and analysis.

Inter-ministerial collaboration needed

For a successful achievement of key policy challenges, the government should develop clear national policies and real cooperation between Ministries and other authorities and stakeholders. Very often national authorities develop plans which do not reflect social needs nor prevent specific problems. For example, employment policies developed by the Ministry for Welfare should be

closely related to the demands of the labour market, which are connected to the area of work of the Ministry for Regional Development and Local Affairs and the Ministry of Economy. Without such an interconnection we get the result that unemployed people are not trained to develop adequate skills suited to the demand of the labour market, thus leaving vacant workplaces on the market.

Cooperation will ensure the development of policies and plans aimed at promoting real social inclusion. The JIM clearly states the need for improvements: *“the lack of a clearly defined policy framework and the lack of a mechanism to promote cooperation between agencies on social exclusion and poverty reduction issues have had a negative impact on the current situation”*.

Very often national authorities develop plans which do not reflect social needs

Developing ‘participation’

The active participation of socially excluded groups in community life should be fostered and increased as one of the key elements to improve individuals’ lives. Some policy issues targeted at inclusion nonetheless need more analysis in terms of whether they really prevent risks of exclusion. As an example are the initiatives around *e-inclusion*, which is undoubtedly a positive initiative, in terms of fostering access to information, but which in itself cannot reduce social isolation.

For almost the first time at a policy development level, the drafting of the JIM has led to the setting up of a dialogue between State authorities and NGOs. The politicians and authorities previously saw NGOs as good service providers only, but not as real partners able to participate in a policy development process. Such progress has to be highly welcomed and the dialogue process should be continued.

Irina Kulitane
Director of Livani Foundation “Balta maja”

Roma still discriminated in Slovakia

Although Roma are explicitly mentioned in the Slovak JIM, there are concerns about the language used to describe them.

In its comprehensive assessment of the Slovak Joint Inclusion Memoranda (JIM), the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) (*) is concerned about some of the language used to describe Roma. For example, the JIM states the following: *"The majority of the Roma are becoming a social minority, rather than an ethnic one. Roma communities overlap with the lowest social strata. Due to cumulative disadvantages, long-term and permanent unemployment among the Roma is widespread and the emerging culture of poverty is transferred to the following generations"*.

The ERRC stresses that Slovak Roma comprise an extremely diverse group and that the Slovak government is at present, in a number of areas, *"unable to provide accurate and detailed data as to the precise circumstances of Roma in Slovakia, and how they are placed with respect to the rest of Slovak society"*. The ERRC further thinks that *"culture of poverty"* approaches have been widely discredited, mainly because they add little to the policy tool-kit for actually addressing poverty and extreme poverty: *"They seem rather to be a mode through which policy actors excuse themselves from responsibility for designing workable and effective anti-poverty programmes"*.

Widespread "antipathy" towards Roma

The ERRC also points out that, by blaming unemployment on *"cumulative disadvantages"* among Roma, the Slovak JIM appears unaware of the widespread antipathy towards Roma in Slovakia, sentiments which have given rise to widespread reports of racial discrimination in the field of employment and render it very difficult - or even impossible - for qualified Roma to secure gainful employment. In addition, Slovakia continues to lack comprehensive anti-discrimination law and has failed to date to transpose the Article 13 Directives into domestic law.

"Without acknowledgement that racial discrimination is a significant factor in the fact of unemployment among Roma, it is unclear how Slovak policy-makers can design effective policies to bring Roma (back) into the workforce", adds the ERRC's assessment.

Finally, notes the ERRC, the denial in the Slovak JIM that Roma comprise an ethnic group is *"extremely inadequate"*: *"Such an approach would seem to indicate that the Slovak government (...) questions the validity of its own domestic minority rights provisions as relevant for Roma. It is unclear how effective policy can be designed and adequately implemented under terms that would deny Roma basic recognition of their fundamental dignity, including among the most intrinsic components of the self, one's ethnic identity"*.

If Slovak policies on eradicating the social exclusion of Roma are to be effective, these basic questions of approach must be addressed in a thorough-going fashion, underlines the ERRC.

Lack of statistical data

According to the ERRC, the lack of clear and accurate data on the situation of Roma in the sectoral fields addressed under the Lisbon process haunts the Slovak JIM. For example, the Slovak JIM states: *"The UNDP puts the unemployment rate among the Roma population at 64%"*. This is the only data provided on the issue of unemployment among Roma.

"If the National Action Plan is to include serious and effective policy proposals, the current dearth of disaggregated data on the situation of Roma in various sectoral fields will need to be swiftly redressed", concludes the ERRC.

V.F.

On the basis of the ERRC's assessment

(*) The European Roma Rights Center is an international organisation which monitors the human rights situation of Roma and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse. Contact details: ERRC, 1386 Budapest 62, P.O. Box 906/93, Hungary. Phone: +36 1 413-2200, Fax: +36 1 413-2201, Email: office@errc.org, website: <http://errc.org>



Roma children on a run-down estate, Slovakia

KEY DOCUMENTS

EAPN

- EAPN comments on the Joint Inclusion Memoranda - February 2004
- Briefing note on the application of the European Social Inclusion Strategy in the Acceding/Candidate Countries to the EU - March 2003
- EU Social Inclusion Strategy: A briefing paper for NGOs in the Applicant countries - February 2002

See: www.eapn.org/enlargement/strat_en.htm

EU

- Joint Inclusion Memoranda - December 2003: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/jim_en.html
- The social protection systems in the 13 candidate countries - March 2003: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/social/index_en.htm
- 2003 Regular and Monitoring Reports on the progress towards accession
- Strategies to implement Structural Funds in new Member States for 2004-2006
- Yearbook on Candidate Countries - 2003 Edition
- Candidate Countries Eurobarometer - Autumn 2003

See: www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index_en.html

EU NGOs

- EU Enlargement: Towards an Equitable Europe - June 2003 (Caritas Europa). See: www.caritas-europa.org
- Building bridges across a wider Europe: Civil dialogue in Candidate Countries (Social Platform): www.socialplatform.org
- Spring 2003 edition of Homeless in Europe, FEANTSA's newsletter: www.feantsa.org/enlargement/enlargement.htm
- Survey on Enlargement and Health - February 2003 (European Public Health Alliance): www.ephia.org/a/39

Useful websites

EAPN: www.eapn.org/enlargement/strat_en.htm

NGOs

- Czech Republic: www.ngo-eu.cz
- Poland: www.ue.ngo.pl
- Romania: <http://database.ngo.ro>

EU

- The Enlargement website - From A to Z: www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/atoz.htm
- European Union Portal on Enlargement: http://europa.eu.int/pol/enlarg/index_en.htm
- European Commission website: www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index_en.html
- European Parliament web page: www.europarl.eu.int/enlargement
- Enlargement - the social dimension: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/enlargement/index_en.htm
- Employment and Enlargement: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/empl_esf/enlargement_en.htm
- Eurostat (Themes/ General Statistics/ Candidate countries): <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/>

Delegations of the Commission

- Cyprus: www.delcyp.cec.eu.int
- Czech Republic: www.evropska-unie.cz
- Estonia: www.euroopaliit.ee
- Hungary: www.eudelegation.hu
- Latvia: www.eiropainfo.lv
- Lithuania: www.eudel.lt
- Malta: www.delmlt.cec.eu.int
- Poland: www.europa.delpol.pl
- Slovakia: www.europa.sk
- Slovenia: www.evropska-unija.si

New Member States' Governments

- Cyprus: www.moi.gov.cy/pio
- Czech Republic: www.vlada.cz
- Estonia: www.vm.ee
- Hungary: www.mfa.gov.hu
- Latvia: www.mfa.gov.lv
- Lithuania: www.urm.lt
- Malta: www.gov.mt
- Poland: www.ms.gov.pl
- Slovak Republic: www.government.gov.sk
- Slovenia: www.sigov.si

Unknown scale of homelessness in Poland

In Poland, a comprehensive and satisfactory overview of homelessness is not available yet. But this does not prevent the NGOs from trying to fill the gap between political will and realities.

A ccording to FEANTSA reports (see box), homelessness has only been gradually acknowledged in Poland since 1989, even if this problem had already emerged during the communist era. However, neither a comprehensive view on the phenomenon, nor a fully satisfactory method of measuring its scope, are not available yet.

Based on the Government's estimations, the number of Polish homeless people would not exceed 30,000 people, while NGOs calculate it between 300,000 to half a million (in a country of 38.7 million). In addition, besides the lack of non-controversial figures, there is no comprehensive definition of 'homelessness' which would depict the complex nature of the phenomenon.

What determinants?

Another debate in Poland is actually related to the determinants of the problem. Some researches emphasise the structural causes such as economic, social and political conditions in post-communist Poland (in particular the growing unemployment rate). Others stress the inadequate legislation and housing policy, while studies mention individual determinants such as alcohol and drug addictions, divorce, family disintegration, etc.

According to qualitative research findings, the portrait of the Polish homeless population contradicts the stereotype about homelessness involving lack of education, old age and alcohol problems. For example, some 30% of the homeless are graduates of vocational schools and have a profession. Nonetheless, the myth that homeless people are responsible for their own fate is still widely generalised in the public opinion.

Legislation and realities

In a general legal sense, the Polish Law does not discriminate against homeless people, who have the right to vote or receive social welfare services, such as temporary shelter, aid in kind, and healthcare. Local authorities, in particular, have an obligation to care for the homeless. But the institutional mechanisms of support do not work, due to the absence of clear regulations and disfunctions at local and national levels. As a result, the relatively quite favourable legislation is not implemented in practice... An example among others: a homeless person who has no social insurance may receive health services in a hospital, which then will send an invoice to the public unit dealing with social support. However, as very frequently hospitals are not reimbursed, homeless people are not easily accepted in hospitals, if at all!

The invaluable role of NGOs

Therefore the role of NGOs in delivering services for the homeless has become crucial over the recent years, giving assistance to about 80,000 – 130,000 persons, including a growing number of women and families. The scale of services is very high: relief help still dominates, but social reintegration projects are now being developed. Yet additional work must be undertaken: the number of places in NGO shelters is insufficient, and most NGO social support centres are concentrated in big cities, while very few if any exist in peripheral areas.

V.F. - On the basis of FEANTSA reports

Two mapping studies

The European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) has recently carried out two mapping studies about homelessness in six acceding/candidate countries (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania). The first mapping exercise has looked at research on homelessness in these countries, while the second one gives an NGO perspective on the nature of service provision for the homeless. Note that this mapping work is being extended to other countries.

See: www.feantsa.org/enlargement/enlargement.htm

The Joint Inclusion Memoranda in brief

The Joint Inclusion Memoranda (JIMs) of the new Member States were formally signed by the Commission and the national authorities on 18 December 2003, with the purpose of providing a sound basis for them to prepare their first National Action Plans on Social Inclusion by July 2004.

Cyprus

The JIM states that the main challenge of social inclusion in Cyprus is to focus on people who become vulnerable: older people, retired persons living in one-person households, disabled people, single parents and immigrants. The Government and the Commission find it crucial to adapt the social protection system to address in a preventive way the consequences of social and economic developments.

The most urgent challenges identified are:

- ensuring appropriate financial support to older persons and retired persons by modernizing the social protection policies;
- addressing the emerging skills mismatches and introducing schemes in order to strengthen employment incentives for persons with disabilities;
- ensuring access to good accommodation and health for all, especially for the most vulnerable groups.

The most immediate policy priorities will be:

- to modernize social protection policies focusing on older persons. In this respect, the introduction of a National Health Scheme by 2008 is expected to ensure a more equitable and effective system of quality health care;
- to implement measures for promoting employability and higher participation rates of women and vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities;
- to combat educational disadvantage by improving every year the educational settings and services;
- to reinforce the statistical capacity of Cyprus, in order to reverse the current lack of culture of evaluation and the lack of up to date data;
- to ensure good accommodation for all.

The revision of the law establishing the Pan Cyprian Welfare Council is expected to contribute to provide a stronger role of civil society in social policy-making and service provision.

Czech Republic

The Czech JIM stresses that the main weakness of the existing systems is the failure to provide incentives to beneficiaries to seek employment. It is also clearly mentioned that employment is considered as the main mean of achieving social inclusion.

The most urgent challenges are therefore:

- to respond to ongoing structural changes which are bringing about changes in the labour market;
- to support and encourage the long-term unemployed back into employment and reduce dependence on social protection;
- to support the elimination of conditions leading to disadvantage in education, and to create conditions ensuring links between the educational system and labour market needs;
- to adapt social protection and health-care systems,
- to increase access to affordable and good-quality housing.

The most immediate policy priorities identified are:

- to create a new system for providing financial assistance;

- to further expand preventive and support measures to enhance employability and to expand and enlarge social and training programmes;
- to modernise the contents of education;
- to interconnect health and social care mainly at community level and to complete and introduce their standards;
- to enhance a properly functioning housing market and to introduce a specialised sector of social housing;
- to improve transport accessibility especially in disadvantaged regions.

It will be important to take into account regional differences. The JIM states that the implementation of the envisaged actions will require devolving individual measures to lower regional and local levels, and ensuring that they have the resources and capacity to develop coordinated and integrated policy responses.



- Population: 705,000 (in Greek Cypriot territories)
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (1997): 16% (Men: 15, Women: 18, Retired: 62)
- Risk-of-poverty rate before all transfers (1996): 24%
- Total employment rate (2002): 68.5% (Men: 78.8, Women: 59.0)
- Unemployment rate (2002): 3.3% (Men: 2.6, Women: 4.2)
- Youth unemployment rate (2002): 7.7% (15-24 years old)



- Population: 10.3 million
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income): 8%
- Risk-of-poverty rate before all transfers (2002): 41.6%
- Risk-of-poverty rate by household type: from 3% (2 adults, 0 child, both under 64) to 27% (1 parent, min. 1 child)
- Risk-of-poverty rate of older people (65+): 6% (Men: 3, Women: 8)
- Unemployment rate (2002): from 3.7% (Prague area) to 17.1% (Ústecký region)



- Population: 1.36 million (including 13% stateless)
- Ethnic profile: Estonians (67.9%), Russians (25.6%), Others (6.5%)
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (2002): 17.9% (Men: 17, Women: 18.7)
- Risk-of-poverty rate for the unemployed (2002): 48.4%
- Risk-of-poverty rate by household type: from 6.9% (2 adults, 0 child, at least 1 adult 65+) to 39% (1 person, -30)
- Unemployment rate (2002): 10.3% (67,200 people)
- Long-term unemployment rate (2001): 6.2% (Men: 6.8, Women: 5.4)



- Population: 10.2 million
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (2001): 10% (Men: 10, Women: 10)
- Poverty rate of Roma (income below 50% of the national median income): 67.1% (overall population: 6.1)
- Risk-of-poverty rate before all transfers (2001): 44%
- Risk-of-poverty rate for the unemployed (2001): 31% (Men: 36, Women: 24)
- Risk-of-poverty rate by household type (2001): from 5% (2 adults, 0 child, at least 1 adult 65+) to 22% (2 adults, min. 3 children)
- Employment rate (15-64) (2002): 56.6% (Men: 63.5, Women: 50.0, Roma: 28.7)
- Unemployment rate (2002): 5.6% (Men: 6.0, Women: 5.1, Roma: 28.8)
- Unemployment rate by region (2002): from 3.9% (Central Hungary) to 8.8% (Northern Hungary)

Estonia

Estonia's strategy should involve transposition and effective implementation of the European Community anti-discrimination legislation. This prohibits discrimination on the grounds of racial and ethnic origin in employment, education, social security, health care, housing and access to goods and services. Issues identified in the course of preparing the JIM serve to emphasise the need for a long term approach and for progressively addressing the challenges as resources become available.

The most urgent challenges are:

- to increase labour market participation,
- to ensure an adequate income for people who are not able to support themselves,
- to ensure adequate financial and other support to families with children,
- to prevent and alleviate child poverty,
- to tackle problems of educational disadvantage,
- to achieve a better integration of education, employment, social protection, health care, housing and other policies at national and local levels.

The most immediate policy priorities are:

- to expand and resource active labour market measures,
- to increase support for larger and single-parent families,
- to raise the level of old-age pensions;
- to ensure that social assistance benefit should be at a level that satisfies the basic needs to live in human dignity,
- to reduce educational disadvantage,
- to increase the supply of affordable housing and accommodation.

The Estonian Government finds it important to ensure that arrangements for coordinating and integrating policies are continued and that there is a continuous process of monitoring and evaluating progress. To this end it will consider setting up a coordinating and mainstreaming team or making other relevant arrangements.

Hungary

The number of measures aiming at ensuring a secure family, protecting children, youth and minorities, and providing quality social services, fair social insurance system and an efficient, well coordinated and targeted support system has been announced. These measures are calling for a comprehensive approach to reduce gender inequalities, improve the social inclusion of the Roma, and provide equal opportunities for the disabled.

The key issue refers to the high level of inactivity. Addressing the inactive and helping them to move into employment should become a high political priority for poverty eradication. Apart from the inactive, unemployed and the disabled, it is important to address the situation of other groups threatened by social exclusion.

The most urgent challenges:

- addressing the educational and labour market weaknesses;
- increasing the current overall employment rate and developing policies to make work pay;
- ensuring access to quality healthcare, social services and to good accommodation for all.

The most immediate policy priorities will be:

- to set up paths to employment and adjust the education and training systems to the labour market requirements,
- to make society aware of the concept of life-long learning,
- to intensify measures in order to reintegrate in the labour market the groups most threatened by social exclusion,
- to ensure that flexible and non-standard jobs provide high standard and commensurate entitlements and social protection.
- to develop care provision to help reconciling work and family life.
- to reform the housing policy.

The Government wants to establish appropriate institutional mechanisms ensuring a closer co-operation between the Government, social partners, local authorities and NGOs, and to decrease regional differences.

Latvia

A key finding emerging from the Latvian JIM is that the quality of education and employment opportunities are the main factors which influence the standard of living of inhabitants. The education system at the moment has not adjusted to the requirements of the labour market. The unemployment level is comparatively high and the essential regional differences in unemployment levels still exist. Polarisation of incomes is increasing and the number of inhabitants who have low incomes is high.

The most urgent challenges:

- to increase quality, accessibility and cost effectiveness of education, with particular emphasis on adapting education and training to be more relevant to the modern labour market and on tackling the problem of young people dropping out of school;
- to reduce the high levels of unemployment;
- to ensure an adequate income for inhabitants while at same time strengthening links between the social protection system and active labour market measures in order to assist as many people as pos-

sible into work and to avoid long-term dependency on benefits.

The most immediate policy priorities are:

- to make education more relevant to the modern labour market;
- to expand and adequately resource active labour market measures aimed particularly at those who are at most risk of long-term unemployment;
- to ensure an adequate minimum income for all;
- to define and implement a State strategy for social housing.

An inter-institutional working group or advisory council with representatives of the highest level of management could be developed in order to better coordinate policies and actions, and to actively involve all relevant ministries, NGOs and social partners.

Lithuania

A Poverty Reduction Strategy was prepared in Lithuania in 2000 and the Government adopted an implementation programme for the period 2002-2004 in November 2002. The elaboration of the JIM has built on the above commitments and efforts.

The most urgent challenges are:

- to increase the level of employment and reduce unemployment,
- to tackle rural poverty and revive disadvantaged rural areas;
- to develop the social protection system so as to ensure that those who are unable to work are guaranteed an adequate income while also ensuring a closer link between the payment of unemployment benefits and active labour market policies;
- to tackle educational disadvantage and to ensure that all citizens gain the skills necessary to access and participate in the new information society.

The most immediate policy priorities are:

- to develop measures to support access to employment of those at risk of unemployment,

- to draw up and implement a rural development plan and other measures for reducing social exclusion in rural areas.
- to develop the social protection system and progressively increase its resourcing with particular priority being given to: implementing the Law on Social Assistance; increasing social insurance pensions faster than growth in average earnings; expanding the payment of social pensions for elderly and disabled individuals who do not receive social insurance pensions; and reducing the rate of the personal income tax for low-income persons,
- to prevent educational disadvantage,
- to increase access to the knowledge society.

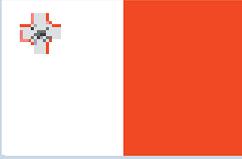
The eradication of poverty and social exclusion will involve constant checking and monitoring of progress, as well as continuation of the process of inter-agency working and the mainstreaming across all policy domains.



- Population: 2.3 million
- Ethnic profile: Latvians (58.2%), Russians (29.2%), Others (12.6%)
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (2002): 16%
- Risk-of-poverty rate before all transfers (2002): 43%
- Employment rate (2002): 60.5% (Men: 64.3, Women: 57.0)
- Unemployment rate (2002): 12.1% (Men: 13.1, Women: 11.0) (Latvians: 9.9, other nationalities: 15.2)



- Population: 3.5 million
- Ethnic profile: Lithuanians (83%), Poles (6.7%), Russians (6.3%)
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (2001): 17%
- Risk-of-poverty rate before all transfers (2001): 38%
- Risk-of-poverty rate by household type (2002): from 21.5% (pensioners) to 42.4% (persons subsisting on benefits)
- Employment rate (15-64) (2002): 59.6% (Men: 62.3, Women: 57.1)
- Unemployment rate (2002): 13.8% (Men: 14.6, Women: 12.9) (Lithuanians: 11.6, Russians: 19.9)
- Long-term unemployment rate (2002): 7.4%



- Population: 400,000
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (2000): 15% (Men: 15, Women: 15)
- Risk-of-poverty rate before all transfers (2000): 30%
- Risk-of-poverty rate for the unemployed (2000): 50% (Men: 57, Women: 31)
- Risk-of-poverty rate by household type (2000): from 11% (2 adults, 0 child) to 55% (1 parent, min. 1 child)
- Employment rate (Dec. 2002): 54.5% (Men: 74.2, Women: 34.5)
- Unemployment rate (Dec. 2002): 6.8% (Men: 6.2, Women: 8.2)



- Population: 38.7 million
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (2001): 15% (Men: 16, Women: 15)
- Risk-of-poverty rate before all transfers (2001): 48%
- Risk-of-poverty rate for the unemployed (2001): 37% (Men: 39, Women: 35)
- Risk-of-poverty rate by household type (2001): from 5% (1 adult, -30) to 32% (2 adults, min. 3 children)
- Employment rate (15-64) (2002): 51.5% (Men: 56.9, Women: 46.2)
- Unemployment rate (2002): 19.9% (Men: 19.2, Women: 20.9)
- Long-term unemployment rate (2002): 7.9% (Men: 6.7, Women: 9.2)

Malta

The main challenge identified in the Maltese JIM concerns the high level of illiteracy, adults with low skills and other labour market shortcomings. The groups most at risk are: disabled people, disadvantage children, and single parents; also low skill adults, people with mental health problems, persons with addictions and some segments of low-income elderly (namely women) and immigrants.

The most urgent challenges are:

- combating illiteracy and improving the educational attainment of young students and adults in advanced age;
- increasing the overall employment rate and development policies to make work pay while promoting more and better jobs,
- strengthening the welfare system and increasing social and affordable housing.

The most immediate policy priorities:

- to raise the provision of vocational education, training and lifelong learning,

- to provide appropriate incentives to take up work for target groups such as women, disabled persons, etc., by putting in place re-training and up-skill courses;
- to set up programs to support women's re-entering in the labour market,
- to reform the social protection system to ensure its sustainability, adequacy and comprehensiveness,
- to reinforce the welfare of those who are dependent: children, disabled persons, unemployed, elderly, pensioners and other groups, by setting up additional programs,
- to increase the housing supply and affordability for the most needy and target groups.

The implementing of the above mentioned measures will require the setting of appropriate institutional mechanisms to ensure the active participation of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Poland

In 2002, the Polish Government launched the Social Policy Strategy for 2002-2005 to identify the most important challenges faced in the field of social policy. It contains a number of measures which have been adopted over the last two years to improve the position of low income groups, to reduce inequalities and promote social cohesion.

The work on the Polish JIM has benefited from all the above commitments. The major challenge of poverty and social exclusion in Poland is still its low activity rate. This refers to the high levels of unemployment, and is related to a high dependency ratio due to the extensive use of early retirement schemes and invalidity pensions. Other risk groups are: elderly people, homeless, children and youth, people from abusive environments.

The most urgent challenges:

- increasing investment in education, developing and extending life-long learning, and stimulating the use of ICT technology;

- increasing employment and bringing people who depend on benefits back to work;
- improving the delivery of quality health services.

The most immediate policy priorities are:

- to refocus labour market policies towards employment activation for different target groups;
- to reinforce the new educational system and introduce measures to reduce drop-outs from schools;
- to strengthen the recent regulations on the vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities;
- to reform the social protection system in the following areas: (i) the system of family benefits; (ii) the social welfare system.

Appropriate institutional mechanisms ensuring a closer co-operation between the Government, social partners, local authorities and NGOs, and to decrease regional differences, will be established.

Slovakia

The Slovak JIM draws particular attention to the link between unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Attention is paid to the situation of school-leavers and the young unemployed, the Roma, the disabled and those with small children.

The most urgent challenges identified are:

- to increase employment level, and to support and encourage greater initiative among those who are unemployed, in looking for work;
- to ensure that reforms of the social protection system both guarantee an adequate income for those at risk, and reinforce active labour market policies,
- to overcome educational disadvantage by encouraging lifelong learning opportunities for all,
- to overcome the extreme poverty and exclusion experienced by the Roma community and to promote their full integration into society.

The most immediate policy priorities will be:

- to intensify measures to promote the integration into the labour market of those most at risk of long-term unemployment,

- to overcome educational disadvantage and make education relevant to modern society and the labour market,
- to develop housing policy, facilitating access to housing without physical barriers for persons with severe disabilities, and developing comprehensive and integrated approaches to tackling homelessness
- to create conditions for reducing poverty and social exclusion levels of the Roma, to continue the fight against discrimination of the Roma, and to promote the inclusion of the Roma ethnic group in the majority society.

Appropriate institutional mechanisms will be developed in order to ensure that a concern is mainstreamed across all relevant ministries. A particular attention will be paid to reducing regional imbalances.

Slovenia

The analysis undertaken in the Slovenian JIM shows that the bulk of people at risk of poverty refers to long-term unemployed and youth unemployment, notably in relation to the existing regional disparities.

The most urgent challenges are:

- increasing investment in education, developing and extending life-long learning, and stimulating the use of ICT technology;
- increasing employment and bringing people who depend on benefits back to work;
- improving the access to accommodation, health and social services.

The most immediate policy priorities are:

- to promote a wide range of active employment policy programmes for different target groups, for long-term, unskilled, young (specially women), elderly unemployed, and especially for the groups who are distant from the labour market and are

socially excluded. This includes the Action Employment Programme for Unemployed Roma adopted by the Government by the end of 2003;

- to implement measures for both reducing drop-out from schools and enhancing lifelong learning;
- to mainstream 'make work pay' in all labour market, employment and social policy areas;
- to put in place measures to increase the provision of social and non-profit accommodation;
- to implement a new system of subsidising rents and to provide adequate housing for the most vulnerable groups;
- to implement a health insurance reform to incorporate more entitlements within compulsory health insurance, and set up additional programmes and social services for the most vulnerable groups;
- to devote a special attention to the most deprived areas when implementing the above measures.



- Population: 5.4 million
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (2003): 5%
- Risk-of-poverty rate before all transfers (2003): 19%
- Unemployment rate (15+) (2002): 18.6%
- Long-term unemployment rate (2002): 12.1%



- Population: 2 million
- Risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (2000): 13% (Men: 12, Women: 13)
- Risk-of-poverty rate before all transfers (2000): 41%
- Risk-of-poverty rate for the unemployed (2000): 40% (Men: 41, Women: 38)
- Risk-of-poverty rate by household type (2000): from 7% (2 adults, 2 children) to 37% (1 adult, 65+)
- Employment rate (15-64) (2002): 63.4% (Men: 68.2, Women: 58.6)
- Unemployment rate (15-64) (2002): 6.5% (Men: 6.1, Women: 7.0)
- Long-term unemployment rate (2002): 3% (Men: 2.6, Women: 3.6)

Nota bene: figures for all countries come from the Joint Inclusion Memoranda. They are indicative, not fully comparable and must therefore be taken with caution.

“Until recently, poverty was declared inexistent”

The Bulgarian Anti Poverty Network was the first network from the accession countries to join EAPN in

2003. Interview with Douhomir Minev and Maria Jeliazkova.

EAPN: What are the characteristics of the Bulgarian transition?

The Bulgarian transition has been characterized by sharp economic decline, increasing of inequalities, low economic freedom, an ineffective normative framework, enormous decrease in living standards, deep social fragmentation and increasing processes of social exclusion.

Reforms, largely dominated by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies, were strictly based on their standards for transformation and increase in economic efficiency. Bulgarian society took a specific way, leading the country outside the European social model and delaying accession negotiations. Hopefully, these will soon be closed, and difficulties will be overcome.

Despite the efforts to increase civil society participation, still the “distance” between the civil society and the negotiation process remains visible. This hampers the opportunities of civil society for adequate participation through dialogue and monitoring. In fact, one of the basic reasons for the specific Bulgarian transition was its non-participative character.

What is the situation with regard to the fight against poverty?

Poverty was either declared non-existent or considered as an unavoidable and unintended result of policies. Recently there has been some change in the political attitude towards poverty, which is now recognised as a basic problem, social policy has taken a prominent place in the political agenda.

The expenses for social policy have also increased. Nevertheless, the trend is far from being transformed: a) a big part of the population lives in poverty (13% according to the World Bank, while 70% of the population declare that they have experienced impoverishment over the

last 10 years); b) very low salaries (10-15 times lower than the European average) result in huge numbers of working poor; c) poorly functioning systems of healthcare and education; d) lack of adequate and paid jobs. Social policy, although it has gained an increasing role over the last two years, cannot in itself counter the powerful poverty generators.

What is the added value to work at EU level?

We have to keep in mind that the way in which transition has occurred has generated a weak development of civil society and has not fostered strong feelings of citizenship. Some transitional myths and ideologies have paralysed the civic activity, such as: 1) “Privatization is panacea for everything”; 2) “If we had had more and enough money, everything would have been all right”; 3) “The blame is always on something distant” - usually more or less distant in time, and increasingly distant geographically too.

In such a context, the establishment of the Bulgarian anti-poverty network is quite difficult. As NGOs are rather weak and lacking their own resources, they try to find resources in building alliances. Two powerful alliances are very important now: the community of social researchers and a specific circle of politicians particularly sensitive to poverty issues.

The third and may be the most important alliance is with EAPN. The need for such alliance explains our willingness to join EAPN Europe. In our opinion the main tasks of EAPN-Bulgaria are: to generate public discussion on poverty generators and the ways to counter them; to intensify the policy research along these lines; to develop interactions with EAPN so as to reduce the social risks of the EU integration, particularly the so-called social dumping.

Interview: P. Brandellero

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Enlargement brings with it a new level of challenge with regards to poverty, social exclusion and social solidarity

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