



EAPN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2004 –FINAL DECLARATION

The EU we want – Strengthening the EU Social Model

On 18-20 November 2004, EAPN held its fifteenth General Assembly in Groningen, Netherlands. This year the key note theme was: “The EU we want – tackling poverty and social exclusion in an enlarged EU”. Within this context, EAPN pursued its own enlargement process by integrating new networks. At the end of the General Assembly, the EAPN delegates adopted the following declaration.

The **enlargement of the EU** creates new opportunities in a very challenging context for the future development of the EU. Diversity in social models in the enlarged EU might be used as an excuse to seek less social Europe and to view enlargement primarily as an economic and internal market project. Such an approach would be devastating in terms of the possibility for the EU to contribute to promoting and developing a European Social Model that is built on high levels of social protection, of quality employment and solidarity. Such an approach would inevitably lead to competition between EU Member States that would put increasing pressure on social protection systems and consequently on people experiencing, or at risk of, poverty and social exclusion.

EAPN through its membership and its work on the ground in the fight against poverty and social exclusion sees that **inequalities** in terms of access to income, access to rights and access to goods and services, are growing. EAPN is also concerned about the growing levels of **prejudice, racism and xenophobia**. At the same time we can observe the emergence of growing numbers of ‘**super rich**’ persons in our European societies. These developments are reducing cohesion in European societies, putting at risk the very notion of a European Social Model and if not countered will inevitably lead to increased tensions between different sections of European society.

EAPN believes that **such developments are not inevitable but reflect the failure of our political systems** to ensure the primacy of human values over market values. In the context of globalisation they reflect the failure to define systems of regulation at local, national, European and world levels that restores the capacity of all societies to determine their future in a democratic, participatory and sustainable way. In order to reverse this trend and to develop the EU we want, EAPN calls on decision makers in Europe to:

1. Promote a **European Union based on effective access for all to fundamental rights** within a sustainable development model aimed at social solidarity, that guarantees a balance between social, environmental, employment and economic objectives. This model should seek to have this balance reflected in its institutional arrangements, in the policy priorities, annual Spring Summit and in the Structural Funds framework, as reflected in the Constitutional Treaty.

2. Restate the **role of fiscal policy**, so as to allow the wide disparities created by the market to be reduced and high quality collective goods and services (i.e., education, health, housing etc.) to be financed.
3. Rehabilitate the **role of public expenditure** which should be regarded as an investment and not as charges to be reduced to the minimum possible, as long as they are based on the principles of sustainable development;
4. Ensure that the approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion addresses the **multi dimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion** – poverty is a violation of fundamental rights and is not just a monetary issue. It also implies issues such as access to decent housing, quality health care, access to child and elder care, employment and lifelong learning opportunities, and access to culture... This approach must provide an adequate response to the demands of people experiencing poverty and exclusion.
5. Ensure that **social protection systems**, including individualized minimum income schemes, are implemented and adequate in all Member States, for all to have a sufficient income to live life with dignity. Progress must be made in adopting minimum standards for social protection, and for the combating of poverty and social exclusion at EU level. The ageing of population should not be systematically used as a pretext for reducing social protection.
6. Ensure that the European Union effectively tackles **discrimination and gender inequality** which are causal factors of exclusion.
7. Develop a **coherent EU immigration policy** that is based on the respect of individuals and their fundamental rights, that is open to immigrants fleeing poverty and people seeking asylum, that is non discriminatory and addresses the reality of undocumented persons already present in the European Union territory.
8. Defend the existence of **quality services of general interest** which allow fundamental rights to be accessed by all, for which a specific legitimacy should be defined.
9. Develop and disseminate regular, systematic research on the **distribution of income and wealth** within the EU and within the Member States as well as research on effective access to fundamental rights.
10. Strengthen **participatory democracy** approaches and in particular to ensure that those experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequalities have the necessary organizational capacity, participative frameworks and financial support to ensure that their voice can be heard in the development, implementation and evaluation of all relevant policies.