

# Network news



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

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Editorial

## The global society - the "haves" never had it so good

**T**ime and again, EAPN has warned against the trend to shackle the European social model to competitiveness and economic growth. The fact is that growth does not automatically spell jobs, and that competitiveness can trigger a competition war through offshoring.

Governments often rely on economic expansion, and the jobs it supposedly brings, as a quick fix for poverty. But it is precisely those who are most out of touch with the labour market that most need social support and a safety net. Dragooning them into work (if they can find it!) often comes down to taking low-paid or even degrading jobs, or to disillusionment and despair... The so-called welfare state is now beset on all sides. The purported "modernization" of social protection conceals policies to force the unemployed into work, throw state-backed sickness insurance systems into question, and encourage the creeping privatization of pension systems.

The global society we now have creates poverty, while liberalization of the economy benefits only the well-heeled. It prompts the somewhat cynical question whether poverty and unemployment are not essential parts of the system. After all, is it not the disingenuous argument about being in permanent economic crisis that is used to freeze salaries, condemn social protection as too costly, and make profitability the yardstick for all human activity?

The European Union absolutely must live up to its pledges on eradicating poverty by 2010. EAPN is issuing a call for a revolution... in thinking. A revolution that could produce high levels of social protection, quality of employment and social solidarity.

Vincent Forest

## THE EU WE WANT

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## Strengthening the EU Social Model

What is the EU that EAPN wants? It is a Europe that will link social and economic development, promote participatory democracy and fight against discrimination.

**O**n 18-20 November 2004, EAPN held a conference and its fifteenth General Assembly in Groningen, Netherlands. The keynote theme for both events was: *"The EU we want - tackling poverty and social exclusion in an enlarged EU"*.

The objective to eradicate poverty by 2010 led EAPN to reinforce its own aims. Views from local, national and European level provided differing insights on the way that the Lisbon agenda can be considered a tool for social inclusion, according to the use that is made of it.

At all three levels, EAPN and its members are recognised as key players vital to the dialogue which can lead on the one hand to a closer identification of needs of the most disadvantaged, and on the other hand contribute to the policy making agenda.

### Inequalities are growing

EAPN sees that inequalities in terms of access to income, access to rights and access to goods and services, are growing. 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.

However, 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 deter-

mine their future in a democratic, participatory and sustainable way.

### How to reverse this trend?

At a time when the Lisbon Strategy and the Structural Funds are up for review, there are fears that a new 'liberal' ideology is undermining some of the earlier strategies. In order to reverse this trend and to develop the EU we want, EAPN calls on decision makers in Europe to promote an EU based on effective access for all to fundamental rights within a sustainable development model that guarantees a balance between social, environmental, employment and economic objectives.

Understanding the reality of those experiencing poverty is crucial to feed into this overall reflection. Decision makers must therefore strengthen participatory democracy approaches to ensure that those experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequalities have the necessary organisational capacity, participative frameworks and financial support to make their voice heard in the development, implementation and evaluation of all relevant policies.

Poverty is not just a monetary issue; it is a violation of fundamental rights

### Providing the tools to create a vision

The approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion must of course address the multidimensional 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...

In light of its own examination of the reality of poverty and social exclusion, EAPN has developed a new vision for future priorities:

- **Supporting the participation of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion:** as mentioned above, participation is a continuous challenge, to make the voice of peo-

### Living below the line

The realities of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion hardly can be grasped by data and statistics alone, and very few qualitative researches on this topic are available. We are therefore publishing some 'snapshots' of the lives of these people which provide a realistic view of poverty and social exclusion in Europe and make people's day-to-day realities visible.

A collection of such "Portraits of Poverty" will be published on the EAPN website and in the future EAPN book entitled *"The EU we want"* (see margin page 7), thanks to the help of EAPN national networks and, in particular, in cooperation with the participants to the European Meetings of People experiencing poverty.

Three "portraits" are summarised in the margins of next pages.

ple in poverty heard, particularly in the light of the EU enlargement to 25 Member States, and the reality of poverty in the new Member States.

- **Ensuring that social protection systems, including individualized minimum income schemes, are implemented and adequate in all Member States**, for all 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. In addition, it is important to rehabilitate the role of public expenditure which should be regarded as an investment and not as charges to be reduced to the minimum possible.

- **Highlighting links between social exclusion and discrimination**: the EU must effectively tackle discrimination and gender inequality which are causal factors of exclusion. Those who suffer higher degrees of social exclusion have more chances of being discriminated; people who suffer discrimination have more chances of being socially excluded. A key challenge is to overcome the political, legal and economic barriers to the implementation of EU policies and legislation to combat social exclusion and discrimination. In addition, the EU should 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 EU territory.

- **Valuing the role of the NGO sector** through greater participation in the elaboration, design, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of social inclusion policies. It also has a role of awareness-raising, training, information, and provision of direct assistance. In the provision of social services, EAPN will fight for the recognition of the role of NGOs as providers. In the light of the proposed EU Directive on services ('Bolkenstein' Directive), EAPN will defend the

existence of quality services of general interest which allow fundamental rights to be accessed by all, and for which a specific legitimacy should be defined.

- **Entering the debate around global solidarity** by demanding that the EU be more effective in shaping the dynamics of globalisation, and by becoming a part of the global social movements. EAPN has a role to break the myth that there are no alternatives, by encouraging an exchange of views, empowering people to change and challenge the system, and by asking what society we want to live in, at the time when the rules of the market, such as competitiveness and efficiency are imposed on all other sectors.

- **Measuring poverty and social exclusion** should cover the common characteristics of all countries but also reveal the specificities of each state, studying quantitative as well as qualitative characteristics. EAPN will join with other organisations to contribute to a better understanding of poverty and exclusion and to propose indicators. Finally, 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 should be developed.

Sources: draft Conference report by Pauline Geoghegan, and final declaration of the 2004 General Assembly



The EU we want!

## ZBIGNIEW'S STORY

*My name is Zbigniew and I am from Warsaw, Poland. I came to Rome, Italy, in 1993 with a work visa. My brother in law used to work there, so he helped me to get my documents. After I had a bad argument with him, I had to leave both the job and his flat in July of that year.*

*I could not find a permanent job, so money was never enough. I started sleeping in the street and drinking. After a while, unfortunately, I also started begging for money. At the end I was only able to think about how to get alcohol; when it was rainy, I felt upset because I could not find any money to drink.*

*I decided I must quit with that life because I did not want to die. I am grateful to the people that helped me to get away from all this, including a Polish woman named Wanda and the Roman NGO CDS (Home of Social Rights). I started volunteering with CDS, working in a street unit for homeless people. After a couple of years they opened a shelter for homeless people, and they employed me in the project. Somehow it is easier for me than for a social worker or for a psychologist to understand homeless' needs or behaviours.*

## A mother on the margin of society

Lotta used to be a gambling addict, her life has been chaotic. She is a Swedish forty-year old mother of four minors, and they have been evicted from their home several times over the years. Then she changed her life and gave up gambling; she got a job and was looking forward to a brighter future. But the man she was living with failed to pay the rent, and Lotta and her children were evicted again.

Since there are quite a few apartments available in Borlänge, Lotta thought it would be no problem getting a new lease, but the housing company, run by the town council, said no. Its only concern was that Lotta had a small debt to the company. The social authorities told Lotta that she could always turn to the social organisation Verdandi, which runs its own housing project. In such a case, Verdandi takes care of the lease and the responsibility for the apartment. When you have lived there for a year and have shown that you can support yourself, then you get to take over the lease. That is how Lotta finally managed to get an apartment for herself and her children. She is very thorough with her bills, but still her future is very uncertain since the job she has got in the Town Hall of Borlänge runs out in May 2005.

## Fighting poverty in an enlarged Union

What policies have been put in place in some of the

Member States to combat poverty and social exclusion?

What should the priorities be in this field?

### BULGARIA

Anti-poverty measures in Bulgaria are considered to be reactive and consequently short-term. They have some effect but only on the depth of poverty experienced; at the same time, however, these policies generate poverty and, indeed, make it last longer. The generators of poverty themselves are not tackled. The consequence of this is that the results of policies turn out contrary to what was intended, creating 'black holes', with more resources being invested whilst achieving less. For EAPN Bulgaria, the three priorities should be:

- A shift from a reactive to a proactive strategy with the need for concrete proposals;
- Networking and the forming of alliances between organisations for the purpose of lobbying;
- The need for a systematic approach, using the Structural Funds to combat poverty and social exclusion.

Note that in Bulgaria, decentralisation has transferred responsibility for social expenditure, without transferring the necessary resources.

### CZECH REPUBLIC

Under the former regime in the Czech Republic people living in poverty were kept apart from society. For this reason, the Czech network prefers to talk about social exclusion and not 'target groups' as used by the government. The existence of networks is a way of countering the weakness or absence of institutions. The challenge will be to increase skills and self confidence among these populations. For EAPN CR, the priorities now are:

- social integration;
- organisation and supporting networks;
- the inclusion of the Roma population.

### ESTONIA

In Estonia there is concern that the National Action Plan on social exclusion was put together by officials without any connection with people experiencing poverty. Priorities in Estonia are:

- Children: 34% of those facing poverty are children.
- Homelessness: 0.3% of the population is experiencing homelessness.
- Health issues, including HIV, smoking and alcohol.

### FRANCE

France is engaged in a vast process of decentralisation of social action, following up on the one previously embarked upon a few years ago. There is therefore a big challenge to ensure the coherence of social provision and for the capacity of grassroots networks to coordinate reactions and representation at local level, and to understand the role of the State. For the French network, the issues are: access to fundamental rights (housing, employment, health and education)

- creating awareness of the reality of poverty by bringing together networks and people experiencing poverty themselves.
- development of an active civil society, particularly in the current context of decentralisation

In France, the decentralised services are responsible for expenditure, but, as they have to advance monies before reimbursement from the state, delays create local cash flow problems, and therefore a less efficient system.

### HUNGARY

In Hungary, NGOs are seeking a specific role in the monitoring of the preparation and implementation of the National Action Plans on employment and social inclusion. NGOs are concerned that the same interdepartmental committee is involved in the implementation as well as the monitoring of National Action Plans. As an example, the fact that the employment policy puts an emphasis on highlighting and solving the number of people who 'disappear' from the statistics each year, makes it difficult to assess the real figures.

## ITALY

In Italy, the Trade Union movement has made big steps forward, but is mostly concerned with people who are already in work, in other words, rights have been given to people who already have some rights. However, four years after the European strategy on social inclusion has been set in place, Italy has no national policy. The National Action Plans on social inclusion have re-stated what already existed in a more systematic way. The Italian network's priorities in the fight against poverty and social exclusion are:

- building a strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion in order to access fundamental social rights: this is needed to be able to implement a strategy against poverty and social exclusion.
- the right to a basic income: Italy is one of the only two countries in the EU15 without a right to a basic income. Whilst the Italian state tends to lean on the family to provide support, in some areas at regional level there is a move towards a 'Citizenship income'.
- a real employment policy, especially in the South, where there is little or no employment policy, and high unemployment levels.

## MALTA

The Maltese network, recently constituted, has decided to make an inventory of aspects of poverty and social exclusion in Malta, and to define priorities, around which a working group (Target Group Committee) has been set up with the aim of proposing a strategy, with the help of «Focus groups» made up of people experiencing poverty and exclusion. The key issues for the Maltese network are:

- absenteeism and the risk of illiteracy,
- Illegal immigrants/asylum seekers/refugees,
- access to services.

## SPAIN

In Spain, a Guaranteed Minimum Income, with a better co-ordination of policies as minimum income guarantees, only exists at a local level. Also note that even if a National Action Plan exists, the regional plans are more important.

In the field of employment, progressive activation policies (such as the provision of training) are welcomed but since the situation of the people experiencing exclusion is not always taken into account, people are stuck between unemployment and precariousness. In the field of education, there is the problem of school drop-out and the consequent lack of skills and qualifications. Moreover, there is a lack of facilities in education with little recognition that multicultural factors need a long term and ongoing approach. The competition for scarce resources is also leading to xenophobia.

*Source: draft Conference report by Pauline Geoghegan*

## Enlargement: opportunities and challenges

EU enlargement creates new opportunities for action on poverty and social exclusion, especially for EAPN. By opening up to networks operating in the new Member States, it will be in a stronger position to make the voice of people living in poverty in the enlarged Union heard, and their needs given proper consideration.

But enlargement also brings many challenges and questions: is the Lisbon Strategy still the right way to go in this context? How can we strengthen existing policies and create new ones to tackle the scourges of poverty and social exclusion that are still there despite economic growth in many new Member States?

The danger that enlargement brings with it is that the increased diversity of social models could become a pretext for putting a social Europe on the line, if enlargement is seen as mainly an internal market-driven economic project. That would inevitably trigger competition between Member States, putting more pressure on social protection systems, and therefore on people living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

## DIANA, A ROMA FACING DISCRIMINATION

Diana lives in a village close to the district town of Rožňava, in South-eastern Slovakia. Half of the 600 inhabitants are Roma. There is nearly 100% unemployment among them.

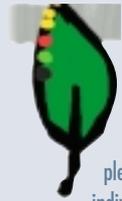
Diana is 21 years old. After finishing primary school, she followed courses in a catering school. When she was sixteen, she left school. Diana still lives at her parents', sleeping on the sofa in the kitchen. All family members are unemployed and their benefits are not sufficient to cover all basic expenses. There is one money lender who "operates" in the village and in the case of unexpected events and needs (such as illness, death in family, purchase of fuel), Diana's family borrows money from him with a 30%-50% interest rate.

Diana cannot leave the village to finish her education and she has almost no chance to find a job. Potential employers, who had promised her a job during phone conversations, gave up their promise after face-to-face meeting. Sometimes, an employer asks her directly by phone whether she is a Roma person; if she replies yes, she is told not to come. Neither Diana nor her family have any plan for the future. Their biggest concern is to hold out from day to day.



Alain Noël

## The Collective for a Poverty-free Quebec



The "Collective for a Poverty-free Quebec" is a pluralistic NGO with no political affiliations that aims to link together people living in poverty and all individuals and organizations that want to help lay the permanent foundations for a poverty-free Quebec (Statistics Canada estimated that 12-13% of Quebec's population were in low income groups in 1998).

Formed in 1998, the Collective started out by canvassing ordinary people's views, which resulted in it adopting a proposal for a Bill on the elimination of poverty in spring 2000. The proposal is the product of the joint labour of thousands of people, many of them living in poverty. The Collective then began intensive lobbying of politicians and public opinion, including handing in to Quebec's National Assembly a 215,307 signature petition in November 2000 calling for Quebec to pass legislation based on the Collective's proposal. More than 1800 organizations of all kinds gave their backing to the demand.

The Collective now keeps the national anti-poverty strategy and the implementation of the resulting action plan under close review within the reference framework it developed as the basis for its own proposal, which went further than the Bill finally passed.

Website: <http://www.pauvrete.qc.ca/>

## "In Quebec, poverty is now a public concern"

What policy does the Quebec Province in Canada pursue on poverty? Alain Noël, researcher in political sciences at Montreal University, explains.

**I**t is not just the European Union that has mapped out a strategy on poverty and social exclusion. The province of Quebec, in Canada, has seen a slew of government and voluntary initiatives in recent years. A view from the other side of the Atlantic could give a useful perspective on the significance of the European strategy.

### EAPN: What are the key points of Quebec's anti-poverty strategy?

**Alain Noël:** *The first thing to say is that Quebec is unlike the rest of the country, in language, culture and history, but also because of the progressive nature of its society. Wages are comparatively low and unemployment high, but the society itself is based on a strong popular backing for social policy and the trade union movement.*

*Even so, the anti-poverty strategy is a relatively recent affair. It was only in December 2002 that "Bill 112" - passed unanimously - laid down a framework that made it a national priority. It also provided for an employment strategy and an observatory on poverty and social exclusion (which has not yet been set up).*

### So where does the voluntary sector come into this?

*Shortly after the "Parti Québécois" came to power in 1994 with a platform of regionalized social assistance, a "Bread and Roses" march was held to demand that the new government do something about poverty. This was when the voluntary sector found itself put on an equal footing with the public and private sectors. "Street parliaments" formed to discuss the idea of a law on poverty. The ability of NGOs like the "Collective for a Poverty-free Quebec" (see opposite) to mobilize support gives them a role as safeguards.*

### What is the impact of this law?

*Following a change of government, in April 2004 (11 months behind schedule) the Bill led to a government action plan focused on incomes: penalties were scrapped, income supplements were granted to the in-work poor and families, but no additional resources were given to help people get back into the labour market.*

*The Bill may have helped re-shape the political agenda and given legitimacy to a series of players in public opinion, but there are no firm guarantees for the future beyond the action plan. So, the strategy suffers from a lack of planning and follow-up. The government is not committed in the long term to concrete measures like increasing the minimum income. Also, the plan includes no poverty reduction goals; it is a step backwards from a law that was meant to embody more of a strategy.*

### Could the Bill be overturned?

*No, no one would dare touch it. More likely would be the players losing interest because nothing tangible was coming through, but that just isn't happening. The sore point is that the action plan contains no mechanism for evaluation and participation. It did provide for an advisory committee, but the new government's action plan provided only for indirect consultation through public hearings in Parliament. This is a clear break from the original Bill.*

### How would you sum up the European strategy on social inclusion?

*It is a major breakthrough, although it has to be queried whether it will achieve its aims. Its big achievement is to have put poverty in the public eye, as in Quebec. Setting a hard target for poverty reduction could have had an energizing effect. But if you look at the Millennium Goals set by the United Nations, you have to admit that progress on the matter is very hard to measure. It might be better to focus on things that have to be done instead of figures, which would make it easier to get front-line actors involved.*

*Interview: V.F.*

## Participation is a right for all!

Participation has always been a central theme for EAPN. As the word is used at virtually every

opportunity, let's concentrate on participation in the policy-making process.

**A**mong the EU objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is the mobilisation of all actors, and first of all of people in poverty. The third European Meeting of People in Poverty in 2004 led to defining the following guidelines in this respect:

1. Policy makers have to be ready to prepare decisions and measures with people living in poverty, in an appropriate way, and have to agree to take the results of the participation process into account.
2. Setting up a participation process is not an informal activity. People living in poverty often only have experience with the controlling and repressive side of the government machinery. In order to bring about effective participation, **a safe and reliable environment** has to be created in which their opinions can be heard and respected.
3. In order to participate as fully-fledged discussion partners in the negotiations or discussions, a **preparatory process** is often needed. In this context, people in poverty must obtain clear information about what exactly is expected from them. They also have to be supported in voicing their opinions. This takes **time and resources** that have to be provided.
4. People living in poverty want to stand up not only for themselves but also for the rights of the entire group. In this respect, it is important for them to be able to transcend their own problems. This is

only possible if they no longer have to put all their attention and energy into worrying about being able to survive. Individual support for personal problems and those of their families is necessary in this respect.

Finally, participants to the third Meeting asked that existing, general participation channels such as advisory boards, trade unions or political parties make an effort to be more accessible to all people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

If people in poverty want to make their voices heard, it is important that they do not remain alone. The associations have a strong role to play by establishing permanent contact with them: visiting, listening to and supporting them.

**It is important that people living in poverty do not remain alone**

The very act of participation seems to be widely accepted today, at least in principle. However, in reality, it is clear that the opportunities and conditions that genuine participation should make possible are insufficiently developed. In order to be

stronger as an association in this endeavour, it is important to be part of a broader network of associations at regional, national and European level.

It almost goes without saying that a network such as EAPN places the participation of those affected high on its agenda. Although this is not obvious at the European political level, EAPN will continue to look for suitable ways and means of achieving this. In the light of the recent expansion of the EU to 25 Member States, there is a pressing need to examine the reality of poverty in the new Member States close at hand and not to assume that this is only a quantitative expansion from 57 to 68 million poor people.

*Source: "The European Union we want", Chapter on participation by Ludo Horemans*

### COMING SOON!

EAPN next publication is entitled "*The European Union we want - Preventing poverty and social exclusion in an enlarged Union*". What are the key trends in poverty and exclusion in the enlarged Union? How is the European project affecting the European social model, based on solidarity and socialisation of risks? What should NGOs be doing to bring home the reality of poverty and exclusion in the EU? These are just some of the many questions that this book will set out to answer.

It will fall into three parts:

- Part One will give snapshots of people living in poverty, a discussion of the realities that the National Action Plans on inclusion disclose, and a selection of statistics.
- Part Two will address six big issues: the glaring wealth gap; measuring poverty and social exclusion; participation; globalization, liberalization and poverty; discrimination and poverty; homelessness, ageing and access to social services.
- The third and final part will consist of the report on the conference held on the same topic in Groningen in November 2004.

This issue of *Network News* gives a heavily condensed run-down of the basics of these various chapters - just by way of a taster!

V.F.

## Preventing homelessness

According to the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), very few countries in Europe have developed specific policy programmes dedicated to the prevention of homelessness. As a result, there is clearly a lack of sufficient information and knowledge about the changing pathways into homelessness.

Prevention of homelessness could lead to develop approaches, such as interventions through education/schools, general housing advice, general living skills, etc., which are quite general in nature and might not be classified as 'homeless prevention' as such. Other approaches are more specific by targeting people who are at particular risk to certain pathways or trigger factors. These approaches include information and advice around evictions, intervention in institutions (prisons, mental health care facilities, and youth care facilities) prior to release, etc.

Increased understanding in how different sectors and services can affect people at risk and sometimes prevent homelessness is necessary. While voluntary organisations have long understood that a joined up approach is necessary to tackle and prevent homelessness, there is a need for authorities to learn to work across boundaries, as homelessness is not a static issue.

See FEANTSA report:  
[www.feantsa.org/files/prevention/prevention\\_report\\_october\\_2004.pdf](http://www.feantsa.org/files/prevention/prevention_report_october_2004.pdf)



## Social exclusion and discrimination

Social exclusion and discrimination are two different processes which interact.

**S**ocial exclusion is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies, or as a result of discrimination.

**Direct discrimination** occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another in a similar situation because of their racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. **Indirect discrimination** occurs when an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would disadvantage people on the same grounds.

Social exclusion and discrimination are two different processes which interact. Poorest people, or those who suffer higher degrees of social exclusion, have more risks of being discriminated in their daily lives and in access to public and private services. People who suffer discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation have more risks of being socially excluded.

### Barriers to EU instruments

Political barriers to the fight against discrimination are the lack of synergy between European and national levels, low relevance at national level, progressive loss of relevance of the issue of discrimination at the European agenda, replaced by the preoccupation for maintaining the Welfare system, the need for the reform of the social protection systems, etc., and the negation of the existence of discrimination by some Member States assimilating discrimination with a mere lack of a job.

There are also many legal barriers, such as slowness and a lack of resources for implementation of legislation, ambiguous interpretation by some

Member States of the issue of discrimination, a lack of mechanisms to guarantee the effectiveness of laws, and low awareness of the importance of the issue for certain key stakeholders, such as lawyers or judges.

Economic barriers include a lack of accountability, no targeting, insufficient use of the Structural Funds for compensating social disadvantages and discrimination and lack of support at national level (no national strategies, no extra funds, no long-term actions).

Some Member States assimilate discrimination with a mere lack of a job

According to EAPN, policies should fight discrimination and social exclusion with mechanisms that guarantee: access to information and services, equal treatment, and compensation for disadvantage. Equal treatment is indeed not guaranteed unless there is a compensation for disadvantages and an adaptation of services to the needs of people.

### Role of the NGO sector

In the fight against social exclusion, we all know that the NGO sector has a role of participating in the elaboration of the social inclusion policies (such as the National Action Plans): design, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation, identification of problems and priorities for specific groups, empowerment of the affected collectives for their active involvement, and providing specific policy measures and guidelines for more effective policies.

As far as the fight against discrimination is concerned, the NGO sector has a role of awareness-raising, training leaders of affected collectives and of specialised groups such as public agents, policemen, judges, etc., collection of discrimination cases, mediation in conflicts, public denouncement of discrimination cases, information, direct assistance to victims and accompanying them.

Source: draft Conference report by Pauline Geoghegan, based on JM Fresno's contribution

## Living in poverty in the global village

It is said that the world has become a village. But it is a village where 20% of the inhabitants are consuming 80% of all goods and where half lives in poverty.

**T**he fifth World Social Forum which took place in Porto Alegre on 26-31 January brought together more than 120.000 people, including Maria Marinakou, president of EAPN. In an open space for democratic debate, issues of poverty and social rights were central and led to concrete proposals for global action. EAPN stressed that one should address the structural causes of poverty both in Europe and the rest of the world: *"The same policies that generate poverty, inequality and social exclusion throughout the world, marginalise the EU's 68 million poor"*, stated Maria Marinakou.

### Facts and figures

Disparities are increasing across the world: 20% are consuming 80% of world goods; the difference has become greater over the last century. Half the world's population lives on less than 2 dollars a day. The GDP of the poorest nation is less than the wealth of the world's richest people. Nearly a billion people are unable to read a book or sign their names! Analysis shows that the gap between the rich and the poor has deepened during the last century.

Beyond these facts and figures, it is clear that globalisation has a deep impact on social policy and welfare states. Neo-liberalism is challenging social welfare systems in industrialised countries and the prospects for equitable social development in developing and transition economies. The question must be: what kind of social policy best suits international competitiveness without undermining social solidarity?

### Looking for a new social paradigm

In this global context, the EU should be more effective in shaping the dynamics of globalisation, and

become a part of the global social movements concerned with the new definition of social rights and social standards.

The EU has a significant role to play in the fight against domestic and global poverty by strengthening the European Social Model and striving for social cohesion - not economic competition at all costs. In view of the mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy, the EU should seek for a new social paradigm. *"It is not only an issue of better global governance, it is more a struggle to switch the neo-liberal globalisation to a global system with a true social dimension"*, added Maria Marinakou.

### Copenhagen+10

Prior to the session of the UN Commission for Social Development on 9-18 February 2005 in New York (Copenhagen+10), EAPN has recalled that social development is also an issue for the wealthy Europe. The Copenhagen Consensus on the need for balanced development (economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing) created some momentum with regards to questioning the dominant development model. Despite their words in Lisbon, there is little or no real commitment from the EU top political levels to maintain the balanced agenda set in Lisbon.

For EAPN, addressing poverty and social exclusion must be at the very core of the EU project, for the benefit of all, here and there: *"In a global world, there should be no false competition created between addressing poverty and social exclusion in the so-called wealthy regions and the need to address the depth of poverty and social exclusion in the so-called developing countries"*.

*Source: draft Conference report by Pauline Geoghegan, contribution by Maria Marinakou and EAPN press release on Copenhagen+10*



World Social Forum 2005 - Photo: Ricardo Stricher

### QUALITY SOCIAL SERVICES

Social services are an important aspect of social protection. In all Member States, a variety of providers (commercial, state and NGOs) represent and share values of solidarity, equality and rights. This is part of the EU discussion on Services of General Interest: social services address human beings, which is not the same as discussing a 'product'.

As changes in social systems move towards individual responsibility, people experiencing poverty need to find quality in the services that are provided. In the light of liberalisation across the EU, where commercial service providers seek to achieve viability and standardisation, there is concern about how to analyse quality in this case. This brings challenges for NGOs, who have to defend the quality of services, especially where there is competition between services. A regulated market is needed to face this, as everyone has a right to quality services.

The draft EU Directive on services ('Bolkenstein' Directive) must be closely examined, for example the 'principle of country of origin': how can the local community control what is coming from another country? Social services must be based on local quality standards.

## The ageing of society

Demographic ageing is a well-known phenomenon. Current figures show that people aged 65-and-over represent 16-17% of the EU population. This figure is projected to rise to around 28% by 2050. Even more significantly, the population aged over 80 is projected to more than double from around 4% of the current population to nearly 10% by 2050.

These projections have led to talk of crisis and other negative perceptions of the ageing of the population. Demographic ageing is presented at best as a challenge and often as a threat to our societies. There is little or no recognition of the contribution made by older people whether in terms of voluntary work or in terms of transfer of knowledge, experience and resources between generations.

However, it is not the ageing of the population itself that is the challenge, but rather meeting the needs of society today and in the future in terms of the development of appropriate health, social and economic strategies, services and policies. The ageing of the population is simply a reality that needs to be taken into account as an important factor when developing such strategies. There are several policy areas and political issues that deserve particular attention, such as pensions, health, long-term care, or intergenerational solidarity. These should never be set aside or ignored...

See AGE website: [www.age-platform.org](http://www.age-platform.org)



## People are not statistical units!

Measuring poverty and social exclusion is often seen as a technical issue, but it should come closer to the understanding of people in poverty.

**T**rying to measure poverty and social exclusion, there is a need for a combination of statistical data and subjective perception of poverty: people should be studied as persons not as statistical units. There is a different understanding of poverty in the various environments of the countries in the EU. Very often statistics are used with political aims and there are attempts to present the data in an un-objective or un-realistic way.

Measuring poverty and social exclusion implies using a wide range of indicators: for example, access to information, literacy, understanding culture, participation in decision-making processes, respect, confidence, fighting criminality, disability and discrimination, access to health, income, food, to public transport, security and safety, employment, education, childcare, housing, etc.

The measurement should be double-sided, to measure the common characteristics of all countries and also to reveal the specificities of each state; indicators have to be designed in a way to study qualitative as well as quantitative characteristics.

It is also important to define how to measure the progress in fighting poverty and exclusion, and therefore to identify indicators that reveal this progress. The indicators should involve such characteristics as rate of participation in labour market, in insurances, gender and ethnic involvement, access to quality health services, education, etc. In this regard, it is important to study the process in the long term, to define the dynamics of the developments, to rely on research, on people's perceptions and on statistical data. The approach has to be flexible enough to combine the specificities and common characteristics of cities, towns, regions, and countries.

Very often statistics are used for political spin

Source: draft Conference report by Pauline Geoghegan

### Handle with care...

It would be wrong to see figures as intrinsically reflecting a plain reality that human beings are powerless to change. Barring the fact that they reflect only part of that reality (the part that can be "modelled" or broken down into what can be counted), it is important to bear in mind that statistics are used for political spin. Settling on the criteria, the conditions of data collection, how the results are presented are all things on which choices have to be made - choices which should never be taken for granted...

The fact that the data shown on next pages are not all-points comparable illustrates that: whereas

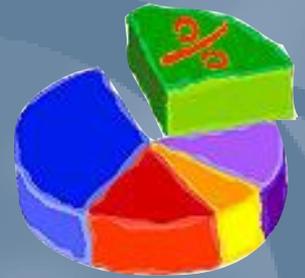
the figures for the EU 15 come from a European survey of 60,000-plus households, those for the new Member States come from national sources. And some only deal with "relative" poverty (linked to the general level of prosperity in each country). But, in most of the new Member States, where incomes are well below those of the EU 15, absolute figures are what are needed to study the effectiveness of "safety nets" for the poorest.

V.F.

## Europe's 68 million poor!

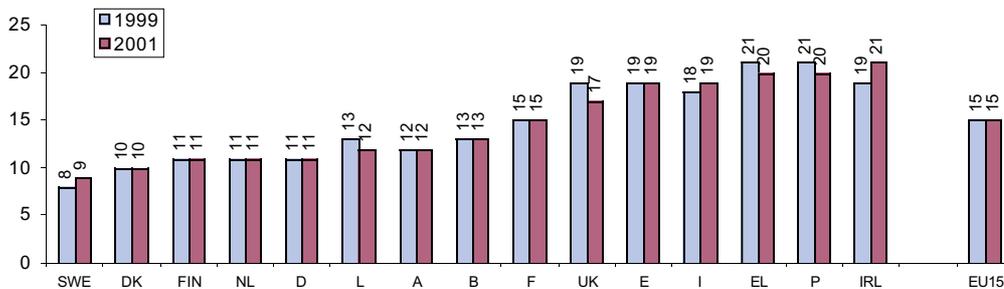
**F**igures available from the European Union's Statistical Office (Eurostat) show a deeply disturbing amount of poverty in the enlarged Europe. The figures suggest that the num-

ber of people living in poverty (i.e. living in households with an "equivalised disposable income" below 60% of the median equivalised in the country they live in) is about 68 million; 15% of the EU total population!



### Overall rates of poverty risk

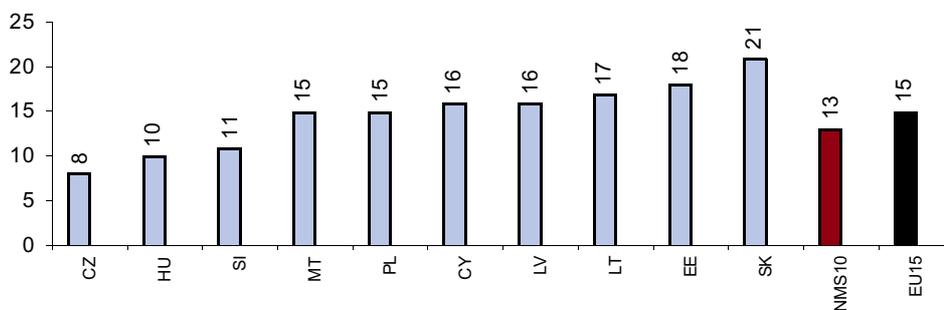
#### Poverty rates in the 15 'old' Member States, in %, 1999-2001



**Ireland, Portugal** and **Greece** are the "poorest countries" - they were the only ones with over 20% poverty both in 1999 and 2001. At-risk-of-poverty

rates in the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy are still above the EU15 average (15%). Sweden has the lowest rate (9%), despite a 1 point rise.

#### Poverty rates in the 10 New Member States (NMS10), in %, 2001



Apart from the extreme positions occupied by the **Czech Republic** (8%) and **Slovakia** (21%), val-

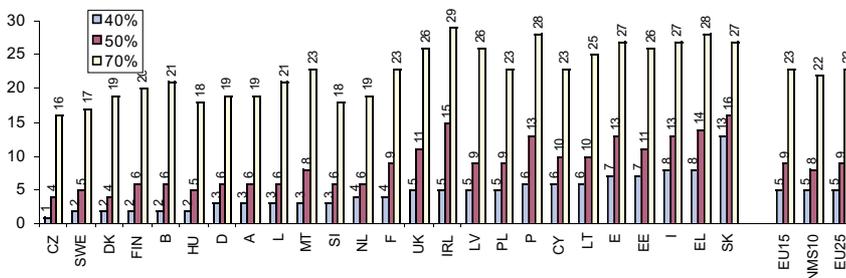
ues range from 10% (Hungary) to 18% (Estonia).

## The depth of poverty

The choice of 60% of national median equivalised income as the 'at-risk-of-poverty' threshold is purely conventional. That's why it is important to look at

alternative thresholds, in particular to know the level of extreme poverty in each country.

### Dispersion around the poverty threshold, 2001



New Member States and EU15 Member States show on average similar performance in terms of exposure to poverty risk. The likelihood of being at risk of poverty varied in 2001 from 5% to 22-23%

for thresholds set at 40% and 70% of the median respectively; it was 8-9% if the 50% threshold is employed.

## Inequality of income distribution

The indicators presented so far focus on the 'bottom' part of the income distribution. It is also interesting to look at the overall income distribution in order to know how European societies share the wealth they produce. This can be illustrated by two indicators:

**The S80/S20 ratio:** For each country this ratio compares the total income received by the top income quintile (20% of the population with the highest income) to that received by the bottom income quintile (20% with lowest income). The

higher this ratio is, the more the distribution of income is unequal.

**The Gini coefficient:** While the previous ratio is only responsive to changes in top and bottom quintiles, the Gini coefficient takes account of the full income distribution. If there were perfect equality (i.e. each person receives the same income), this coefficient would be 0%; it would be 100% if the entire national income were in the hands of only one person. As in the case of the S80/S20 ratio, the higher this coefficient is, the more the distribution of income is unequal.

### S80/S20 income quintile share ratio and Gini coefficient



The EU25 average of the S80/S20 ratio was 4.4 in 2001, which means that the wealthiest quintile had 4.4 times more income than the poorest. Ratios ranged from 3.0 in Denmark to 6.5 in Portugal. For the same reference year, the Gini coefficient was

28 for the EU25, ranging from 22 in Denmark and Slovenia to 37 in Portugal. As showed in Figure 8, the rankings of national S80/S20 ratios and national Gini coefficients are quite similar.

V.F.

For EAPN, the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion requires a global and integrated approach

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