

Network news



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

N°113 | JULY - AUGUST | 2005

Editorial

A powerful instrument for social inclusion

The present crisis in European integration provides an opportunity for the European Union to reflect not just on the Constitution but on the structural funds planned for 2007-2013.

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) has long argued that the structural funds can be a powerful instrument for social inclusion. We also know that the structural funds have fallen far short of that potential. Social inclusion has not been made the priority that it should be. Governments have not engaged Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) concerned with social inclusion the way they should have. NGOs have been accepted as partners only reluctantly. The consultation process for the funds has been weak. Imaginative means to deliver the structural funds to excluded communities, such as global grants and technical assistance, have been little used. The Commission has shown little interest in exercising its powers of oversight to ensure the full observation of European requirements for transparency, partnership and inclusion.

This current enforced pause in European integration should provide a critical space so that, come 2007, the new structural funds can move forward with a renewed sense of purpose.

Brian Harvey - Advisor to EAPN

THE EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS

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EAPN Manual: second edition

This autumn EAPN will launch the second edition of its manual on the structural funds. The first was published in 1999 and was used by NGOs concerned with social inclusion, both in the 15 'old' member states and in the new ones for their pre-accession programmes. The new 2005-2006 manual brings the story up to date with the new structural fund proposals for 2007-2013 and the experience of the ten new accession states. This is a not just a manual on how to help social inclusion NGOs to be successful applicants to the structural funds.

The manual focuses on all aspects of the management of the funds: how to get information, the key documents, the application of the partnership principle, who manages the funds, the role of social inclusion, delivery, access, monitoring, evaluation and technical assistance. Case studies of good practice are given - as well as some examples of how the structural funds should not be managed. Above all, the manual is for NGOs wishing to influence the policies around the structural funds. As one NGO put it in eastern and central Europe: the structural funds were not just about the money, but using the funds as an instrument for social change.

B.H.

The new Structural Funds: unleashing their potential?

The Structural Funds story may possibly be one of the most exciting - and successful - stories on wealth distribution at supranational level. However, much remains to be done.

The resources poured by the Structural Funds in the most disfavoured areas and groups of the European Union have definitely contributed to reduce "wealth gaps" within the European Union and to foster economic and social development, whilst raising awareness on the need for such redistributive role of certain European policies.

A true emphasis on the social inclusion dimension needs to be ensured in the upcoming Structural Funds programming period; as, even if the new Structural Funds regulations seemed to be promising in this respect, some deceiving signals have unfolded during the last few months. The lack of agreement on the Financial Perspectives at the European Council on 16 and 17 June and the pressure to downsize the budget by some Member States is likely to seriously limit the resources allocated to the Structural and Cohesion policy. The lack of enthusiasm in engaging NGOs and the reality that the revised Lisbon Agenda is beaming its unbalanced spirit in detriment of the social pillar in the whole Structural Funds process is diminishing the prospects for a new programming period which prioritises social inclusion.

Indeed, the Structural Funds have the potential to alleviate poverty and social exclusion in the European Union; but only if they are guided by enlightened priorities, values and methods.

Community Strategic Guidelines

When the new Structural Funds were proposed in spring 2004, the Commission made important procedural changes. Member States would have greater responsibility for how the Structural Funds operated in their country and the level of

Commission supervision would be reduced. In exchange for greater independence in Structural Funds operations, the Commission would expect Member States to devise their Structural Funds according to common themes, called Community Strategic Guidelines.

On 29 June, the European Commission issued the final proposal for the *Cohesion policy in support of growth and jobs - Community Strategic Guidelines 2007 - 2013*.

The paper re-situates the Community Guidelines in the *Growth and jobs* perspective of the revised Lisbon strategy – not by chance they are titled '*Cohesion policy in support of jobs and growth*'. EAPN has pointed out that the original Lisbon strategy (2000) contained a balanced commitment to economic, social and sustainable development, while the revised strategy (2005) has a one-sided emphasis on the economic pillar.

The emphasis of the Community Strategic Guidelines in the paper is strongly on the 'jobs and growth' agenda. However, growth alone will not solve the problems of poverty and social exclusion in Europe: indeed, growth without social responsibility

has historically exacerbated poverty and inequality. Policies for social inclusion, whilst they must address centrally the current high levels of unemployment in Europe, must also confront problems of poverty and social exclusion that extend far beyond the labour market.

**Growth alone will
not solve the
problems of poverty
and social exclusion**

Key issues (not) addressed

Governance is an important aspect of the Funds and the Commission was right to present such a theme, but the proposals in the Guidelines fall far short of their potential. The Commission, in recognizing the importance of building the capacity of governmental actors in the Structural Funds, failed to appreciate the significance of similar measures for civil society and non-government organisations. The priorities and themes of the guidelines include welcome commitments to social inclusion in transport, innovation and entrepreneurship, employment, modernizing social protection systems and

cities. There are detailed provisions for pathways to integration, social support and care services and community development. However, there is scope for improvement in the sections on the rural areas and cross-border cooperation, as well as in the section on *More and better jobs*. Whilst the mention to quality employment is very welcomed, there is a lack of emphasis on the need for a joint employer and employee approach to the creation of better jobs as well as on the need to make sure that social protection systems intended to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion are strengthened - and not weakened - when undergoing the so much praised modernization process.

The importance of EQUAL is at last recognized, but the guidelines should be strengthened to require Member States to demonstrate the mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles.

The final agreement of the Community Strategic Guidelines will only follow after the adoption of the new Structural Funds regulations.

Structural Funds regulations: the state of play

In July 2004, the European Commission published the draft regulations for the new Structural Funds, covering the period 2007-2013. There is one lengthy general regulation, followed by short, specialized regulations for the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the cross-border instrument. There is also a draft regulation on the new fund for rural development, EAFRD.

At the moment, the new Structural Funds regulations have been discussed at the Parliament; but they are also pending an agreement on the Financial Perspectives which would enable their adoption by the Council.

One of the hottest issues within the current negotiating process, which is amongst EAPN concerns, is precisely the acknowledgement of the role of NGOs and civil society as full partners in the Structural Funds process - ranging from planning, to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Even if the first draft of the regulations proposed by the

Commission on July 2004 explicitly mentioned NGOs as full partners, the Council intends to water down such proposal deleting any explicit reference to NGOs. Some MEPs are encouraging the Council to maintain the initial wording, with the support of social and environmental NGOs.

Not by chance, NGO involvement is also an issue within the negotiation of the Community Strategic Guidelines, which fail to give due weight to the importance of strengthening the role of the non-governmental sector in Structural Funds planning, design, delivery, implementation and evaluation, along the lines proposed in Article 10 of the draft Structural Funds general provisions regulations.

The Council intends to delete any explicit reference to NGOs

The way forward

69 million people are today living below the poverty line in Europe. This striking figure shows the extent to which social inequality must be stated as a central problematic in modern European

society, one more overwhelming than spatial inequality.

Although the promotion of social inclusion is recognized as an element in structural fund policy, it receives little more than passing mention in the Community Strategic Guidelines. In view of the danger that the guidelines will send a message to the Member States to prioritize the economic at the expense of the social, we need to restate the need for strengthening the social inclusion dimension of both the regulations and the Guidelines, as well as well resourced Structural Funds which are able to fund the necessary actions to combat poverty and social exclusion. The European Union has the means to end poverty within our generation; then, why should we strive for less?

Nuria Molina

EAPN Policy and Development officer

NO AGREEMENT ON FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES, YET

The sensitive moment Europe is undergoing was only worsened by the result of the European Council on 16-17 June. The Council failed to reach an agreement on the EU budget for 2007-2013 - even if the European Commission had already lowered its initial petition (1.24% of the Gross National Income, GNI) to a more modest 1.14%.

The main burden to reach an agreement over the last few months has been the aim of six net contributors to the EU budget to cap it at 1% of the EU's GNI at the start of the next financial perspective. Indeed, the Luxembourg Presidency recognized that the failure to reach an agreement was owed to a lack of political will.

Although social inclusion is not a prominent part of the financial perspective, it is also reasonable to presume that measures for social inclusion under Structural Funds could be vulnerable if the financial perspective were to be cut back from 1.24% to 1% of European GNI. The importance of the structural funds as a means of combating exclusion, the value of the structural funds as a means of funding NGOs and the situation of the new member states could be seriously threatened if the UK presidency wants to find an agreement at any cost.

N.M.

The Community Strategic Guidelines

Interview with Ms. Elisa Roller, DG REGIO, European Commission

EAPN: What are the Strategic Guidelines and the new dimensions they bring to the next period of Structural Funds?

Elisa Roller: *The 2005 Spring European Council was a ground-breaking occasion for EU cohesion policy, with an endorsement at the highest political level of its importance for achieving the Lisbon strategy.*

The Commission's proposals for the next generation of cohesion policy programmes, 2007-2013, encompass 2 main priorities:

- 1. The strengthening of the strategic dimension of cohesion policy to ensure that Community priorities are better integrated into national and regional development programmes.*
- 2. Ensuring that there is greater ownership of cohesion policy on the ground with a better partnership between the Commission, the Member States and the regions.*

The strategic dimension of cohesion policy is reflected in the Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion, intended to help Member States, regions and local authorities to promote economic growth and jobs with closer synergies with other Community priorities. The Guidelines provide a first step towards the coming programming phase and will serve as the basis of the National Strategic Reference Frameworks.

Will the Commission have less of a supervising role?

In exchange for more decentralized management of the Structural Funds (SF hereafter), the Commission's proposals envisage a more strategic approach to cohesion policy. This will allow national, regional and local authorities to take greater ownership over the SF, but it also provides the challenge of ensuring that the different European regions keep in line with Community priorities of helping to deliver both sustained economic growth and more and better jobs.

Do you think they increase the prospects of using SF to promote social inclusion?

Yes, indeed. Particularly the third priority of the Guidelines, "More and better jobs", but also the first and second ("Making Europe and its regions a more attractive place to invest and work" and "Improving knowledge and innovation for growth")

respond to the wish to decrease poverty and social exclusion. This may be done through specific actions to promote equality or to combat discrimination, as well as by taking account of how the management of the funds may affect women and men, disadvantaged groups or sectors of the population at risk.

But jobs alone do not necessarily lead to poverty reduction and social inclusion...

That is correct. And that is why the Guidelines emphasize that for both the convergence and competitiveness objectives, social inclusion is one of the key principles to both stimulate growth potential in poorer regions and promote economic change in other regions. Widening the base of economic activity, raising employment levels and reducing unemployment are vital to sustain economic growth but also to promote socially inclusive societies and combat poverty. However, cohesion policy must go hand in hand with Member States' efforts to implement employment policies aimed at achieving full employment and strengthening social and territorial cohesion.

How do you envisage NGO participation in the new round of the SF?

The Commission is keen on ensuring NGO participation in the SF process and has supported their inclusion in the partnership arrangements of SF programmes. The Commission intends to continue its practice of consulting social partners on an annual basis and encouraging Member States to uphold the partnership principle in the different stages of the programming cycle. Authorities at the national and regional level responsible for the SF need to ensure the engagement of the partners in every stage of the process.

Do you expect that NGOs will be able to access the funds devoted to build administrative capacities?

The Commission's proposals for cohesion policy include an envelope for technical assistance. There is no reason why NGOs would not be able to access these funds to participate in the programming process.

Interview: Nuria Molina



Elisa Roller, DG Regio, European Commission

The UK NGO experience of the Structural Funds

In 2003-2004, the UK voluntary and community sector delivered 214.9 million euros of European Social Fund for 1052 projects.

In need, the UK model is essentially one of un-paralleled partnership. The key to this has been the use, by successive Governments, of the 2% Technical Assistance (TA) that is available for the management of programmes. This has enabled the voluntary sector to build and deliver projects within the specific requirements of European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Moreover, the proximity of NGOs to the economically/socially excluded has enabled the Funds to target the disadvantaged and hardest-to-reach. As the sights of the present Government policy move to the economically inactive, there is available an extensive NGO sector infrastructure that the Funds have directly helped to put in place.

Not limited to delivery

The involvement of NGOs has not been limited to the delivery of projects. The sector has been invited to attend regional and national Project Monitoring Committees. This has led to involvement in the design, selection and monitoring of projects with peer stakeholders.

The credibility of the sector's position at the strategic level is rooted in the commitment and expertise of NGO providers at street-level. For example, the London Voluntary Sector Training Consortium (funded by ESF TA through the Government Office for London) has successfully argued a tale of two cities thesis, whereby the skill needs of those working in the capital (usually, commuters from outside) are differentiated from those of local residents (often, characterised by social disadvantage). The consequent "inclusion" strategy now forms a key part of the regional response to the Government's National Skills Strategy.

In these important respects, the sector has worked to promote the convergence of the employment and

social inclusion agendas, as expressed at the EU level through the respective National Action Plans.

Ways forward

The current governmental pre-occupation with the "economically inactive" is shifting attention to developing programmes targeting the hardest-to-reach. Here, emphasis will need to go on access and capacity-building strategies for those small NGOs operating in non-mainstream settings. Future priorities must offer space to build on, and to mainstream, the global (small) grant initiatives that the UK Government is pioneering under the present ESF Programme.

In anticipation of the July Informal Council Meeting of the EU Employment and Social Policy Ministers, in Belfast, EAPN UK has joined other NGOs in issuing a declaration with the following specific recommendations:

- The EU should promote the fight against poverty and social exclusion through all available policy and funding mechanisms as well as developing greater synergy

between its inclusion, employment and growth strategies.

- The EU should develop a compact-style agreement between its institutions and the voluntary sector to ensure proper consultation procedures and transparent working practices are in place.
- A strong Structural Fund policy is essential to address social and regional inequalities in Europe and to make an impact on its deeply embedded problems of inequality, discrimination and social exclusion.
- Whilst Structural Funds should be focused on the most disadvantaged member states, they should at the same time remain available to the original 15 member states in significant proportions.

Further involvement of NGOs in the design and management of the Funds is now central to EU Cohesion Policy. Hopefully the UK will continue to play a crucial part with the Funds adequately charged to achieve the convergence of the employment and social inclusion agendas.

The EU should ensure proper consultation procedures

NGOS: PART AND PARCEL IN THE PROCESS?

Few months after the release of the Commission's proposal for the new Structural Funds draft regulations in July 2004, EAPN issued a position paper which strongly welcomed the extension of the partnership principle to include civil society, NGOs and equality bodies as full partners in the structural fund process. EAPN has long argued for such an extension, beyond the classic social partners to civil society, and for the involvement of NGOs and the social partners in the full range of the structural funds operations: planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

EAPN warmly welcomed the partnership principle in the new article 10 of the general regulation, as it included amongst the partners: "any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women".

In view of an eventual weakening of Article 10 by the European Council, EAPN highlights the relevance of NGOs in the elaboration and the implementation of development strategies and programmes and is currently lobbying together with other Brussels-based NGOs to maintain on the legal text the important explicit mention to NGOs.

N.M.

New member states and structural funding: an experience from Hungary

Useful links

The Community Strategic Guidelines

- Cohesion policy in support of growth and jobs: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/050706osc_en.pdf
- EAPN response to the Community Strategic Guidelines: www.eapn.org (EAPN Publications)

New Structural Funds Regulations: Reports from the European Parliament

Committee on Regional Development - http://www.europarl.eu.int/committees/regi_home.htm (adopted reports):

- Report on the proposal for a Council Regulation laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund
- Report on the proposal for a Council Regulation establishing a Cohesion Fund
- Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Regional Development Fund
- Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing a European grouping of cross-border cooperation (EGCC)

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs - http://www.europarl.eu.int/committees/empl_home.htm (adopted reports):

- Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund

It is difficult enough to evaluate the effects of the Structural Funds and even more difficult to make a complete evaluation. It seems that if Structural Funds are used effectively, they may have several positive effects. However, it seems also true that if too much time and effort is spent accessing the funds and implementing the programme, the experience can end up having an overall negative effect on the project that an organisation has awarded.

Often paperwork

As an NGO dealing with structural funds, our experience with structural funding in Hungary is that the Managing Authorities of the different operational programmes feel that they are the most important part of the entire procurement and implementation process, even of the whole cohesion policy. Of course, it is their duty and obligation to ensure that only worthwhile projects are funded. However, is it really necessary to make the implementation process so time consuming and complicated? If more than half of the working hours are used fulfilling administration paperwork, it becomes quite obvious that there is less time and money available to fulfil the objective of the project for which the structural funds was obtained. Structural Funds should serve those in needs, instead of those who are pushing paperwork.

What NGO participation?

Regarding the participation in the design of the first National Development Plan (NDP), the non-governmental actors both had the chance to participate in the design phase. However, it meant you got an almost-final draft version at a conference to submit any addition or amendment.

As regards the prospects for participation in the design of the upcoming National Strategic Reference Frameworks, learning from their past experiences, several Hungarian umbrella organisations set up a very innovative project in order to ensure that their voice is heard during the upcoming National Strategic Reference Framework.

This cooperation seeks, as a goal, to get a maximum publicity around the process. Not only does this mean that any application process requires public dialogue, but also that it forms the framework for a forum of partnership and cooperation. The group which consists of 15 organisations including the Hungarian Anti-Poverty Network - emphasising the core activities - has written a letter to the Prime Minister and organised a press conference. Symbolizing the uncoordinated design process they have streamed a bulk of marbles on a chess table. Can you play chess with marbles?

Otherwise the social NGOs - and the whole social sphere - have a better position to participate and to carry its points. That is mainly thanks to the very well organised social planning network that is unique among the ministries. The problem that we see with the present process is to complete it within the fixed deadlines. The process is constantly falling behind schedule. As a result, the last phase of the process - public dialogue - is often removed.

Is it necessary to make the implementation process so time consuming and complicated?

Policy making and shaping

The social planning network involves the social NGOs as equal partners. Therefore they could have a significant role within the process, but the basic question is whether the overall social sector is able to lobby for its objectives, and this situation could vary from region to region.

With the setting-up of the above-mentioned cooperation, there is no doubt that we should be able to fully participate in policy-making and policy shaping. However, the main issue remains the capacity of this group to effectively lobby for its objectives.

*Edina Horváth & István Dandé
Hungarian Anti Poverty Network - EAPN task force on SF*

Priorities of the UK Presidency

The UK Government's general approach to the Presidency was first outlined in the February White Paper "Prospects for the EU" with a

Foreword by the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw. In also acknowledging the UK's Presidency of the G8 group of leading industrialised nations, he asserts "2005 will also be a crucial year for EU and international efforts to reduce global poverty".

With the actual launch of the UK Presidency, following the negative referenda in France and the Netherlands as well as the inconclusive Luxembourg Summit, several restatements have been linked to the Presidency website www.eu2005.gov.uk.

Three main headings

Generally, the UK Government priorities are grouped under 3 main headings: Economic reform and social justice, Security and stability, and Europe's role in the world. The task under the first of the above is described: "A Europe better able to create jobs, higher living standards and modernised social protection". At the outset, the target is identified in terms of the implementation of the 2004 Kok Report. The final version of this Report has clearly stressed the primacy of economic over social progress. For those of us concerned to tease out the immediate scope for any future *European social agenda*, we need first to note the tenor of Prime Minister Tony Blair's speech to the European Parliament: "The issue is not between a 'free market' Europe and a social Europe... There is not some division between the Europe necessary to succeed economically and social Europe. Political Europe and economic Europe do not live in separate rooms. The purpose of social Europe and economic Europe should be to sustain each other."

The detail of UK Presidency actions within the *European social model* may be viewed through the planning of key milestone events over the next 6 months. Voluntary and community groups linked to EAPN have been involved, with civil servants, in the planning of two flagship meetings organised by the Department for Work & Pensions, notably: the Social

Inclusion Round Table, in Glasgow, on 17-19 October; and the European Social Fund Conference, in Manchester, on 14 October. In the former, there is a commitment to involve the experience of the UK Delegation to the Fourth Meeting of people experiencing poverty; in the latter, there is the decision not only to invite a range of voluntary/community sector service providers but also to showcase the UK implementation of *ESF global grants* via the London *Fast Forward* project, which has attracted more than 4000 street-level groups.

EAPN UK statement

In addition to the many other dedicated activities, EAPN UK is anxious to involve key governmental actors in the forthcoming EAPN General Assembly, in Liverpool, from 23-26 November. A special Open Day Celebration for NGOs is being organised for Wednesday 23rd, when we hope

that GA delegates arriving early will have the chance to meet a range of UK activists from all 4 UK nations. Meanwhile, to influence the launch of the Presidency, EAPN UK has issued a press release entitled "Fight against poverty should be at the heart of Europe", in which the UK Network calls on Tony Blair to ensure that his commitment to 'make poverty history' also extends to the 68 million people across Europe still affected by poverty.

In his recent speech to the European Parliament Mr Blair stated that he believes "in a Europe with a strong and caring social dimension. I would never accept a Europe that was simply an economic market." By putting progress on tackling poverty at the heart of the UK's Presidency the Labour Government would ensure that the EU works in the interests of those most in need as well as restoring some much needed credibility to the European project. EAPN UK has called on the UK Government to make use of the Presidency to make clear its commitment to a Europe where the drive for economic growth is meaningfully balanced with real progress towards a more cohesive society.

The UK Government's commitment will be shown by:

- ensuring that the goal of making a 'decisive

Economic growth and increased employment do not by themselves tackle poverty

PROFILE OF EAPN UK

Consistent with the UK Government's model of devolution, activities of the EAPN UK are conducted under a loose 4-nations infrastructure. The light-touch, over-arching framework is the EAPN UK Liaison Group (UKLG). Following the established tradition by which the 4 national networks rotate the representational and secretariat duties on a 2-year cycle, the England Network is co-ordinating 2004-2005 with Scotland taking over at the end of the next EAPN General Assembly, in Liverpool.

The constituent members of the UKLG are:

- Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network, NIAPN - funded with staff (Frances Dowds, Development Co-ordinator, frances@niapn.org)
- The Scottish Poverty Alliance, SPA - funded with staff (Peter Kelly, Director, peter.kelly@povertyalliance.org)
- Anti Poverty Network Cymru, APNC - temporarily funded (Louis Loveland, louise@gellideg.net)
- EAPN England - temporarily funded (Clare Caves, clare@cefet.org.uk)

Over the year, the UKLG activities at the 4-nations level have involved initiatives linked with the UK Coalition against Poverty (UKCAP) on matters relating to the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion; and with the Third Sector European Network on issues arising from the National Action Plan on Employment with regard to the European Structural Funds.

Ray Phillips
UK representative at EAPN Executive Committee, ray@lvstc.org.uk

impact' on poverty by 2010 remains central to any revision of the 'Lisbon' agenda. This goal cannot be sacrificed in the rush to achieve economic growth

- supporting the exemption of social services from the Services Directive. Social services play a key role in promoting social inclusion and access to rights. As the Commission revises the Services Directive, the UK must ensure that the important role that social services play is protected from competition.
- putting in place processes that will help moves towards a more democratic EU through improved participatory democracy and good governance. The Government should use the Presidency to ensure that social NGOs across Europe are involved in the drafting, implementation and evaluation of the Lisbon National Reform programmes as a step towards a more participatory and open European Union.

Make poverty history in the EU, too!

As the UK took over the Presidency of the EU on 1st July, Peter Kelly, a member of EAPN's UK Liaison

Group, said: "The European Union remains distant and seemingly unconnected to the lives and concerns of most people in the UK. For many people, the EU is all about incomprehensible constitutions, subsidies to agriculture and bureaucracy. Tony Blair is correct when he argues that the key role of the European Union is to improve people's lives and that the leaders of Europe must reconnect with the people of Europe to restore credibility.

The UK's Presidency comes at a vital time of the European Union, where there must be genuine debate about the way forward. In leading that debate, the UK must recognise that economic growth and increased employment do not by themselves tackle poverty. If the UK is to put itself at the heart of Europe and provide real leadership, it must offer Europe a social vision as well as an economic one. Above all the Government must be able to show how its approach will help make poverty history - not only in the developing world, but in the UK and across Europe".

Ray Phillips - Convenor, EAPN UK

Using the NAP Inclusion to 'Get Heard'

Getting the voices and experiences of those who have experienced poverty and social exclusion heard in the development of anti-poverty policies is at the heart of much of the work of EAPN Networks. However this is very often much easier said than done!

The EAPN networks in the four nations of the UK have worked closely with other anti-poverty NGOs to use the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAP Inclusion) as one way of ensuring the voices of those experiencing poverty are heard at a national, as opposed to local, level. EAPN has worked with the UK Coalition against Poverty (UKCAP) to set up a Social Policy Task Force whose role it is to engage with the Government department responsible for the NAP Inclusion. This Task Force has been supported by a wide range of anti-poverty NGOs including Age Concern, Oxfam, ATD Fourth World, and the UK Disability Forum.

A Participation Toolkit

Whilst the Task Force has been able to work together to help raise debate about key policy issues such as income adequacy, debt, in-work poverty, one of the main outcomes has been the 'Get Heard' project. 'Get Heard', which is part funded by the European Commission, is designed to ensure that the voices of those experiencing poverty is heard in the development of the next NAP Inclusion. Community based organisations are being encouraged to run workshops with the help of a Participation Toolkit, the outputs of which will be feed into the development of the NAP Inclusion 2006-2008. This process will help ensure that voices that are often silenced in our society are heard. In addition, we hope that involvement will help strengthen anti-poverty networks and help provide new impetus to anti-poverty policy making in the UK. To find out more about the 'Get Heard' project go to www.ukcap.org/getheard

Peter Kelly - Scottish Poverty Alliance on behalf of EAPN UK

NGOs, including grassroots organisations, can make a vital contribution to achieving the aims of the Structural Funds

N° 113
July - August 2005

printed
in English and French
and also available in other languages
at www.eapn.org

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Network News aims to generate debates on specific themes. The views expressed are not necessarily those of EAPN. If you want to comment on the content of this issue, send an email to team@eapn.skynet.be

EAPN
EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

With the support
of the European Commission