



EAPN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2005 – FINAL DECLARATION

Delivering the Social Inclusion Agenda - From Promise to Reality

On 24-26 November 2005, EAPN held its sixteenth General Assembly in Liverpool, England. This General Assembly welcomed the Norwegian and Cypriot Networks into membership of EAPN. This year the key note theme was: "Delivering the Social Inclusion Agenda". At the end of the General Assembly, the EAPN delegates adopted the following declaration.

The delegates to the EAPN General Assembly are very concerned about the **growing inequalities, increasing levels of discrimination and the alienation of disadvantaged communities** within many of the Member States of the European Union. These developments, which result from the lack of investment in social policies and programmes can not be ignored. Responding to these developments must lead to a stronger focus on the European Union social inclusion strategy, increasing its effectiveness and aiming at greater social cohesion.

The political priorities established at EU level are contributing to these increasing inequalities. In this regard the delegates to the General Assembly expressed their anger regarding the following:

- The lack of any reflection on social inclusion and social cohesion in the National Reform Programmes, which are a central component of the revised Lisbon strategy. This lack of focus on social cohesion is a direct result of the decision made by the EU leaders to focus the revised Lisbon Strategy primarily on jobs and growth.
- The proposal to weaken the comprehensive and common objectives for the EU social inclusion strategy agreed by the Heads of State and Governments at the Nice Council in 2000. This proposal has the threat of decreasing the political commitment to the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion. We will not accept a reduction in the strategic importance of these Plans and a weakening of their ability to be an instrument to drive forward policies to fight poverty and social exclusion.
- The failure to make the social inclusion dimension a central focus in the current negotiations on the new Structural Funds legislative framework and the failure to acknowledge NGOs as full partners in the Structural Funds management and delivery.

Political priorities at EU and National level have to be reconsidered in light of this reality. The General Assembly thus called on all relevant actors and in particular on the political leaders at EU and National level:

1. To affirm a vision of a **Social Europe** where all citizens and residents have effective access to all fundamental rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. The debate on the future of the European Social Model must aim at contributing to such a vision and must seek to involve citizens and residents in this debate in order to bring the EU project closer to the people.

2. To ensure a strong focus on social inclusion and social cohesion in the **National Reform Programmes** which are a central component of the revised Lisbon strategy.
3. To increase their commitment to the **EU social inclusion strategy** and the **National Action Plans on social inclusion**. This will involve, improving policy coordination at both EU and National levels, a better involvement of National Parliaments and the different levels of government and greater cooperation with NGOs fighting poverty and social exclusion. This will also involve a closer scrutiny of economic and financial policy decisions with regards to their impact on social cohesion. These National Action Plans need to be backed up by adequate financial investment to ensure their effectiveness and they should remain a central instrument to drive forward policies to fight poverty and social exclusion.
4. To ensure that the **comprehensive and common objectives** agreed by the heads of State and Governments at the Nice Council in 2000 remain at the heart of the proposal from the Commission to streamline the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.
5. To ensure a **complementarity between anti-discrimination policies and policies to promote social cohesion**; in particular to ensure that the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion adequately address the needs of individuals and communities experiencing discrimination, notably racism.
6. To recognise the historical roots of immigration into the EU and to **address the reality of migrants** already living in the EU. This must commence with the development of comprehensive and coherent integration policies at Member State and EU levels aimed at increasing the economic, civil and political participation of migrants. The EU must not close its borders to economic migration. At the same time, it must realise existing international commitments to support and invest in development policies and measures aimed at reducing economic and social inequalities generated by globalisation trends.
7. To ensure that the current political focus on employment will result in the development of an **inclusive labour market** which gives access to quality employment for all who are able to work while significantly reducing the numbers of working poor. Employment policies should offer equal opportunities and equal pay for men and women and should provide adequate support for caring responsibilities and support for the reconciliation of work, family and community life. The importance of the social economy should be reflected in employment policies.
8. To acknowledge NGOs as full partners in the Structural Funds management and delivery, which is essential to unleash the **great potential of the Structural Funds** to promote social inclusion and social cohesion within the EU. Access of NGOs fighting poverty and social exclusion to Structural Funds enables these funds to be used to better respond to the needs of people and communities experiencing disadvantage and to develop and implement programmes and actions with the individuals and communities concerned. The direct involvement of the people and

communities concerned is essential to ensure that the Funds respond to their needs and develop appropriate opportunities. Access of NGOs to structural funds should not be blocked by bureaucratic processes or requirements of National Authorities which can not be met by grass-root NGOs. This has particular relevance, in this period, for the new Member States.

9. To strengthen **participatory democracy and civil dialogue** approaches and in particular to ensure that people experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequalities and the organisations in which they participate, have the necessary organisational capacity, participative frameworks and financial support to ensure their participation. The European Meetings of People experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the follow up of these meetings in many Member States is a good positive example that must be further developed
10. To guarantee rights for all to **quality social services**, such as health and employment services, and **public utilities**, such as fuel and water and to ensure adequate control and regulation of such services by appropriate public authorities.

The continuing scandal of widespread poverty in a rich society, such as the EU, is intolerable. The next round of National Action Plans for Inclusion must move Europe substantially towards the agreed EU goal 'to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010'. As the participants to the fourth European Meeting of People experiencing poverty and social exclusion said, '**The Poor cannot wait**'.