

Network news



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

Editorial

Is the Lisbon strategy working for social inclusion?

The figures of 72 million people at risk of poverty, 18 million unemployed and 14 million working poor in the EU, raise the following question: is the revised Lisbon Strategy really delivering employment policies that work for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion? This was one of the key questions raised by EAPN at the recent Employment Week held in Brussels and is also addressed in its new publication "*Voces from the poverty line - Jobs and unemployment in the EU*", which is previewed in this issue of Network News.

This issue also offers contributions to the debates on 'Flexicurity' and on the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market. In the light of these debates, EAPN calls on the EU and Member States to take a new direction on EU employment strategies, before it's too late. One that recognises:

- The importance of an adequate minimum income, capable of ensuring a dignified life,
- That access to quality health, education, training, transport and housing services etc. is essential for removing barriers to employment,
- The need for integrated pathway approaches to work and inclusion,
- The importance of empowerment, participation and respect,
- The need for pro-active measures to defend social rights and to tackle discrimination,
- The importance of decent jobs - insecure people need secure jobs, not flexible contracts.

However, no changes are likely unless we see greater participation of all stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty, in these debates. Only then can we hope to build the momentum to deliver an EU which is closer to the citizen and to the social EU we want.

Fintan Farrell
Director of EAPN

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FOCUS ON EMPLOYMENT

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Decent jobs!

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Not too old to work! George's story

George is over 50, married with 2 children. He was made redundant from a Maltese shipyard in 2003.

During the British colonial period (from the 19th century till 1979) the dockyard was the main industry in Malta, employing a large proportion of Maltese workers. In 2003, the Malta Drydocks and Malta Shipbuilding were dissolved. 1700 workers from the original workforce of 2600 were given alternative jobs, leaving 900 workers with an uncertain future. In the end, 418 took up early retirement schemes while the rest were absorbed into a new company.

George was selected for early retirement because of his age. He received a redundancy payment amounting to EUR 17000 – EUR 1000 for each year he had worked there. Because he was over 50, George did not qualify for alternative employment. He felt the management criteria for selection for redundancy were unfair.

"Many hard-working people were kicked out"
says George

About George...

George began working in Malta Shipbuilding in 1986. He left his father's small firm and thought he had a secure job for life. He had gained new skills and work experience including insulation, wall-panelling, and installation of freezers. Redundancy came as a painful shock to George and turned his life upside down. George registered as unemployed with the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC). He was willing to try any kind of job. However he was out of work for a year and a half and didn't receive any state benefit. He was refused unemployment benefit because he owned a garage big enough for two cars, which was valued at EUR 25000.

The ETC put him in contact with almost 90 companies with job vacancies. He followed them up, but got no interviews. Often he didn't even get a letter to tell him that the vacancy had been filled. He also applied for jobs advertised in the newspapers, without any success. At that time the ETC

had no special programme for older workers like George and he wasn't offered any retraining.

Too old to work?

George challenged one employer who said, "Aren't you a bit over the hill?". George replied that he was still in good health and had just painted his home, and wasn't he also the same age, more or less, as the interviewer?

The psychological strain on George and his family was severe. He had to use his savings and redundancy pay for the family to survive. George says *"It felt as though everything I had gained in forty years of working life was lost. I would not have got through without the support of my wife and family"*. His daughter's marriage made his financial problems more difficult. In Maltese culture marriage is a very expensive affair which is mainly the responsibility of the father of the bride.

George is now working part-time as a maintenance man in a private company. His salary is only EUR 110 net per week - a third of what he used to earn in the shipyard (the minimum wage for a full-time job in Malta is EUR 144 per week). But George is very pleased. Part-time work gives him more flexibility, and he's not under pressure of constant supervision. He would still consider a good full-time job if offered one.

George says *"The atmosphere in the family is much happier, and I feel that we have become stronger as a family as a result of going through all this together. Money is not everything – at least I've got some income now"*.

Testimony published in EAPN booklet "Voices from the poverty line – Jobs and unemployment in the EU" (see margins pp.2 & 3)

New EAPN booklet

EAPN is particularly concerned about the implications of a narrow focus on jobs and growth for the 72 million people at risk-of-poverty and 18 million unemployed in the enlarged EU of 25 Member States.

The EAPN booklet *"Voices from the poverty line – Jobs and unemployment in the EU"*, developed by the EAPN Employment Task Force, focuses on the lives of real men and women. Eight EAPN National Networks have interviewed people they have been working with on a regular basis. Some of these people are working, some are unemployed, and some have never managed to get a job. All of them have been living on or near the poverty line and are experiencing directly the impact of Member States' strategies to promote jobs and growth. They represent just a small snapshot of how Europe is working or not, for the most vulnerable people experiencing poverty and social exclusion today.

Booklet available from the EAPN secretariat

Supporting people in poverty into decent jobs



Source : EC

Is the Lisbon Strategy delivering on growth and jobs? At this year's Employment Week, EAPN urgently reminded audiences that growth and jobs were supposed to be "**at the service of social cohesion**", according to the the Spring Council held in March this year. Examples of how "Lisbon appears to be missing the mark", in its current obsession with 'Make Work Pay' and Activation strategies, were also the focus of the EAPN showcasing event.

According to Ronald Janssen of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), despite the enthusiastic adherence to 'Make Work Pay' policies at national level, EU poverty rates are increasing and active labour market policies actually reduce the chance of escaping poverty because they encourage a "shake out" in employment statistics rather than creating new training and jobs. Contrary to the Activation creed, which emphasizes the need to reduce benefits so as to "incentivise" the unemployed into work, recent studies have proven that higher benefits often actually **increase** the likelihood of unemployed people finding jobs. This is because they enable unemployed people to invest in decent job search and training which can help get confidence, skills and access jobs.

Jobs at any price is not the answer

The poverty/poor job trap is another concern for EAPN. Whilst "punitive" activation policies continue to undermine poor people's income levels, and their sense of security and well-being, the jobs on offer by the employment services are all too often, low-paid, precarious, or short term. With 14% of the EU population cited as working poor, it's clear that jobs at any price is not the answer. The rush to introduce Flexicurity approaches is only too likely to exacerbate these problems unless radical steps are taken to challenge the race to the bottom to make it easier for businesses to hire and fire, without giving priority to creating a secure working and living environment for all.

Lisbon
appears to be
missing the
mark

The Lisbon focus on "Getting more people in work" also cannot succeed unless pro-active measure are taken to counteract discrimination at work. EAPN's experience highlights the desperation of older workers ejected from jobs, at the top of a firms redundancy list or immigrant women being channelled into low-paid, often undeclared, cleaning jobs, despite their skills and experience; or entire Roma families, who become resigned to never getting employment or equal treatment in access to the most basic of services.

Ensuring an adequate income

Without a strong commitment to fundamental rights, these policies can never effectively challenge social exclusion and poverty. Social protection systems are also the cornerstone of the European Social Model, but are acknowledged by the EU (MISSOC data) as providing a patchy, and an often inadequate safety net across the EU. For many, this highlights the need for a new legal framework at EU level, which will ensure an adequate income for a dignified life, as raised in the Commission's recent consultation.

A commitment to fundamental rights, to social standards and practices in services, as well as creative approaches towards employment and roads to inclusion are vital to reaffirm the social pillar of Lisbon, if it has any chance of eradicating poverty by 2010. 72 million people at risk of poverty and 18 million unemployed are waiting for the answer.

S. Jones

VOICES FROM THE POVERTY LINE

"Employers do not want to employ people with a disability, as they may think it would take longer to train them in or to do the job than it would for a 'normal' person (...). I have applied for so many jobs and been to interviews but still get rejected by employers (...). This is not right. We can do the job as well as anyone else."

Rose, Ireland

"The reduction of my benefits means that now I don't have enough money to buy food in the last week of the month (...). The shower is broken, electric light bulbs are expensive, and I badly need a new mattress because of the problems with my back."

Anja, Denmark

"I felt ashamed of asking for help, and of being a beneficiary of the Guaranteed Minimum Income. I always wanted to work and I like to feel useful."

Maria, Portugal

"There are many young people with good education and no jobs. Bulgarian employers do not respect people who have qualifications and abilities. They still pay the minimum salary."

Julian, Bulgaria

Working time and work-life balance

The highest proportion of companies and organisations offering flexible working time arrangements in Europe is to be found in Latvia, Sweden, Finland and the UK, a new survey on working time from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions reveals. At the opposite end of the scale, Cyprus, Portugal, Greece and Hungary have the fewest companies offering such arrangements. The findings of the survey were presented at Employment Week 2006 in Brussels, on 17 May.

According to the survey results, "*both companies and employees can benefit from the introduction of flexible working-time arrangements*". The survey also stresses that employee representatives regard the introduction or extension of flexible working time arrangements as the preferred initiative for improving their colleagues' work-life balance.

Find out more on www.eurofound.eu.int/areas/worklifebalance/eswtfindings.htm

'Flexicurity': an EU and national concern

The Danish model

Denmark has shown that it is possible to have low unemployment rate, high employment and good social services, that flexibility on the labour market with adjustment to changing conditions and income security is possible.

An important element of the Danish labour market system is a high level of organisation in trade unions and employers' associations. About 80% of the workers are members of a trade union. The aim of flexicurity is to make the re-employment effect after unemployment strong, to make the labour market flexible and dynamic towards new challenges and to safeguard the employees against economic deprivation in case of unemployment.

The Danish model is the outcome of a long tradition of co-operation between the social partners characterised by mutual respect and a tradition of consensus. The model has a 100 year history in which the employers have had the right to hire and fire. The system of unemployment benefit is also that old. Thus historically the Danish labour market system reflects the interests of the employers of flexible rules on recruitment and dismissal and the interests of the employees of economic security irrespective of the labour market status. This is combined with an active labour market policy with education, training and qualification measures.

The Danish labour market system is not a fix-all solution. In past periods Denmark has had high unemployment rates and low growth. However, the Government has tended to expand and activate the economy aiming at generating an increase in demand. It means labour market policy cannot stand alone. It must be accompanied by an active economic policy for which flexicurity might be a strong catalyst but not a generator in itself.

O. Meldgaard

A view of the French approach

For two decades, France has turned its back on the new realities of mobility and job insecurity, because they challenged the whole context in which our labour law has developed and made tenured civil service-style jobs for life for all - the model to which all French people aspire - even more unattainable. This denial was behind the belief that unemployment could be cured by benefits and a disregard for the right to work, the main thing being to preserve labour law and continue improving the conditions for those who were in work. Cutting working time to 35 hours with no trade-off between time and income is a case in point. Whence the idea of a French preference for unemployment.

The realization that France is under-performing relative to its European neighbours has stirred some action, but it will not be plain sailing. One problem stems from the fact that trade unions, shaped by the origin of their members, mainly civil servants and employees of public corporations, will continue to have difficulties in finding ways of bringing the social compromise up to date in the social dialogue with the other side - private employers. Talking about flexicurity means looking from all angles at once at the realities of those both in and out of work, employment contracts and unemployment benefits, the portability of employees' rights and unemployed people's exercise of their rights. That could throw into relief the inequalities in the situations of protected employees and the rest. Which may not be to everyone's taste!

P. Boulté



Source : EC

"Much more flexibility than security"

Interview with Joël Decaillon, Confederal Secretary,

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

EAPN: Does ETUC support the development of 'Flexicurity' strategies?

Joël Decaillon: We've found that we're getting much more flexibility than security. We're getting job insecurity, low-paid jobs, contingent and temporary work... in most countries, that goes against previous labour practises. We need to find out what security is for employees and the unemployed alike. What needs to be guaranteed in mobility so that pay and rights which may have been built up over many years are preserved and don't disappear overnight?

Is sufficient account being taken of the impact on the working poor, concentrated in low paid and precarious employment?

Not that I can see! Europe is forever going on about mobility, mixing up geographical mobility and occupational mobility. But it is the lowest-paid and lowest-skilled employees that are most mobile within small areas. The Commission itself estimates that Europe today has 80 million low-and unskilled employees.

We are falling well short of the Lisbon Strategy objective. New practises based on real local labour bargaining are essential, and we don't want to see part of this world of work increasingly marginalised in a Europe that caters only to high-level graduates in so-called "modern" jobs.

What measures do you think need to be taken?

This issue isn't just about bringing in and preserving minimum employment standards, which are essential to improving quality and protection for all workers – whether in work or not - and creating a robust framework to contend with relocations and reorganisations. It's a problem that tops the agenda for many employees, and the way it is addressed will be crucial for the future of labour relations. The problem is knowing what industrial activities and what services Europe needs, and how we want that Europe to develop in a globalizing economy.

We see a need to engage negotiations at all territorial levels, involving large firms, to strengthen the rules on information and consultation in the workplace, so that an effective right for the workers concerned to reintegrate into the labour market can be put in place, supported at European level by the Structural Funds and framework agreements between the social partners. This process must be based on vocational training, which also means the social partners having a leading role in developing and implementing it, and real recognition for the skills developed.

Basically, it comes down to improving social democracy and participation by providing a robust legal framework that enables employees to contemplate more mobility with greater assurance about their social protection.

Interview: S. Jones

WHAT'S THE ETUC?

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) was set up in 1973 to promote the interests of working people at European level and to represent them in the EU institutions. The ETUC's objective is a European Union with a strong social dimension that safeguards the wellbeing of all its citizens.

At present, the ETUC has in membership 81 National Trade Union Confederations from 36 European countries, as well as 11 European industry federations, making a total of 60 million

members. In addition, the ETUC coordinates the activities of the 39 Interregional Trade Union Councils, which organise trade union cooperation at a cross-border level.

The ETUC is one of the European social partners and is recognised by the European Union as the only representative cross-sectoral trade union organisation at European level.

See: <http://www.etuc.org>



Employment and unemployment rates

	Empl. (%)	Unempl. (%)
Austria	67.8	4.5
Belgium	63.3	9
Czech Rep.	64.2	8.3
Denmark	69.1	5
Estonia	75.7	5.4
Finland	63	9.2
France	67.6	8.8
Germany	63.1	9.7
Greece	65	9.5
Hungary	59.4	10.5
Greece	56.8	5.9
Ireland	66.3	4.5
Italy	57.6	8
Latvia	62.3	9.8
Lithuania	61.2	10.8
Luxembourg	61.6	4.2
Malta	73.1	7.3
Netherlands	73.1	4.6
Poland	51.7	18.8
Portugal	67.8	6.7
Slovakia	57	18
Slovenia	65.3	6
Spain	61.1	11
Sweden	72.1	6.3
UK	71.6	4.7
EU25	63.3	9

Source : Employment in Europe 2005

'Make Poverty History' in the UK

A broad platform of anti-poverty organisations has launched a campaign for quality jobs and benefits levels allowing people to live in dignity.

Anti-poverty organisations and networks from all over the UK have come together to try and forge a coalition with the objective of mobilising the public to challenge poverty in the UK with a view to positively changing public attitudes. The objective is to secure the commitment of all major political parties, by the end of the campaign, to the goal of ending poverty in the UK within a generation.

The impetus for this drive to work closer together came from the success of the 'Make Poverty History Campaign' in raising awareness of international poverty issues and solutions. Organisations came together for a conference hosted by the TUC Unemployed Workers Centres (UWCs) late last year and since then have been working towards agreed objectives, a broad policy platform and a timetable for action. Although agreement has not yet been reached there is a strong desire from all quarters to make this happen. Too often the anti-poverty movement has appeared fragmented and unable to effectively speak with one voice on the central issues of the day which affect those with whom we organise.

Broadening the approach

The TUC Unemployed Workers' Centres have been in existence for over 25 years. There has, however, been a decrease in the number of Centres due to funding problems and the marginalisation of unemployment as a central issue for local authorities and funding bodies. The decrease in numbers has caused the remaining activists to broaden their approach, recognising that many of the issues facing those out of work overlap with the agendas of other anti-poverty groups and bodies. The level of benefits to unemployed people and those unable to work is central to the issues confronting issues around ill-health (both mental and physical), housing, debt, and child

poverty as well as many more social problems and areas of concern. The Peanuts4benefits campaign, launched in 2004, brought together many groups that share the common goal of bringing a recognition of the damage that is being caused by poverty benefits. The experience of the effectiveness of this joint working inspired the UWCs to reach out further in forging partnerships.

In the UK, the drive to move people off benefits at all costs has meant that the UWCs have campaigned for both quality jobs and benefits levels allowing people to live in dignity. There is much that we can gain through working with other activists and organisations.

An umbrella mobilisation

It is not the intention of those trying to bring the coalition about to replace what already exists or to diminish or steal individual organisation's agendas and specialisms but to allow all to give backing and practical support. By bringing our efforts together, the whole will be greater than the sum of its parts. The campaign must strengthen its member organisations not detract from them.

The campaign will be an umbrella mobilisation. Agreed structures will enable involvement from all countries within the UK and will involve, at every stage, activists living in poverty. It is likely that the campaign will focus on a year of action in 2008 in the run up to the next general election. The will is certainly there to make this happen and all the major organisations and networks are involved. With unemployment in the UK on the rise again and with millions living in poverty both in and out of work we must seize the initiative.

C. Hampton

EAPN Finland and the EU Presidency

EAPN Finland will be involved in many events organised in the context of the current Finnish Presidency of the EU.

The aim of EAPN-Fin is to raise public awareness on topics relating to poverty and social exclusion, and to promote a more socially aware European Union embracing all its citizens. An issue of particular importance for the network is the poverty of children and families with children. This subject matter is supported by recent research and experiences which indicate the weakening position of families with children. We will inform the public about all information and experiences we have collected during the year in a seminar to be held on 27 October, at the same time as our general meeting.

The 27 October EAPN-Fin general meeting is conveniently right after the Fifth European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion, to be held in Tampere on 16-17 October, and the NGO event which is held straight after that, on 17-18 October. The Round Table is the most significant and largest event for EAPN-Fin during the Finnish Presidency. The EAPN-Fin has been a member of its planning committee and as such participated in its preparation. We have also put forward important topics for the programme, speakers, and informed and consulted other EAPN partners about the progress, for example at EAPN Executive Committee meetings.

Fifth Round Table on poverty and social exclusion

The Finnish Presidency wishes to emphasise a strategic approach aiming at promoting sustainable social protection with a strong emphasis on equity, cohesion and participation. The fight against social exclusion and poverty requires engaging in rewarding employment and access to all resources, rights and services. The Fifth Round Table concludes the entire programme period.

Fifth Round Table will focus in its opening plenary

on poverty and social exclusion in contemporary Europe. Four workshops will be convened on: (1) active inclusion (activation, access to services and minimum income, and how to integrate employment and inclusion policies in a balanced way); (2) the role of social services when combating social exclusion; (3) mainstreaming social exclusion; (4) and social rights and minimum social standards. To complement site visits, a seminar titled "Poverty and Media" will be organised. A tribute is paid here to the International Day against Poverty (to be held on 17 October). The conclusion "Reflections from the NGOs" will be presented by EAPN.

EU social policy and national models

EAPN-Fin participated to the Informal Social Affairs Conference on 6-8 July, where Social and Health Ministers, and Ministers for Labour - together with other relevant NGOs - discussed about the challenges created by globalisation and changing structure of the population. The topics for the working groups were: increasing production by developing the quality of working life; prolonging careers with social policies; and health and work. Each subject matter was addressed separately from male and female perspectives accordingly. For EAPN the most significant meeting was the three-party meeting with NGOs on 6 July.

The Finnish Presidency news will be communicated to the EAPN General Assembly in October. EAPN will participate in the Finnish Presidency Conference on "EU's Evolving Social Policy and National Models", to be organised on 8-11 November, where the appropriate internal market topics will be discussed. In addition to all this, EAPN-Fin aims to publish its own views and concerns in all other social and health events. EAPN and EAPN-Fin documents, as well as current consultations and opinions, are an efficient way to publish and distribute those topics that are important for us. Furthermore, this way we can keep the EU We Want in the minds of the decision-makers and general public.

Ari Saarto
President, EAPN-Finland

PRESIDENCY'S SOCIAL PRIORITIES

In its preliminary agenda for the six-month EU Presidency, Finland outlines the main themes to be dealt with, in relation to cross-cutting issues and specific EU policy areas.

As far as social issues are concerned, the Finnish Presidency will concentrate on employment and social policy, equal opportunities and labour law, with the aim of responding to the challenges arising from globalisation and demographic changes. For instance, it seems that the general principles for "flexicurity" should be approved just after Finland's Presidency comes to an end.

Finland will also focus on improving the quality of working life as a way of increasing the employment rate and boosting productivity. During the Finnish Presidency, the Commission is to produce a Green Paper on the future of labour law, dealing with new forms of work and the balance between flexibility and security. On the basis of the Communication, Finland will endeavour to formulate a Council position on the short-term challenges for labour law.

Presidency's website: <http://www.eu2006.fi/>



What does EAPN Finland look like?

E

APN Finland is a partnership network of organisations, associations and action groups. The aims of EAPN-Fin are to improve the situation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and to promote social rights, basic security, welfare and independent life. EAPN Finland was founded on 27 October 1994. As a starting point was a European project owned by social- and health organisations. Today the network consists of 32 member organisations with thousands of members.

Strategy: Our strategy is to fight against poverty through lobbying and a shared vision for a better future. Our member organisations are also active separately. It is therefore important to have discussions together as organisations sharing the same vision have more power. For us 'bottom-up' means working to make the voices of our members heard. It also means that we have to listen to our members carefully.

Working methods: EAPN Finland has Executive Committee meetings once a month. The process

linked to the National Action Plan on social inclusion is a very important tool. We have four open task forces on the following themes: social policy, international issues, health and poverty issues, and child poverty. This year we have identified a special theme: child poverty. We are going to have a national child poverty seminar in autumn in connection with our national general assembly. We also organise "open hearings" of child families: we are collecting stories about how sickness and disability cause poverty among families with children.

Our member organisations mostly work around issues such as poverty, public health, disability, alcohol and drug policy, social welfare, health policy, child welfare, mental illness and protection of patients at law. We emphasise that human dignity and deferential treatment are everyone's basic human rights. We wish to promote citizens' own control of life.

Tiina Saarela

Development officer, EAPN Finland

Facts & Figures

- Population: 5.2 million, 17 inhabitants per square kilometre
- Area: 338,000 square kilometres
- Official languages: Finnish and Swedish
- Head of State: Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic
- EU accession: Finland joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1961, became member of the European Union in 1995 and was one of the founding members of the Eurozone in 1999.
- Gross Domestic Product (GDP): EUR 151.9 billion
- Inflation rate: 0.2%
- Employment rate: 67.6%
- Unemployment rate: 8.8%
- Long-term unemployment rate: 2.1%
- Percentage of GDP spent in social protection: 26.9%
- Employment rate of older workers: 51.4%
- Youth education attainment level: 84.6%
- At-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers: 11%

Sources: Statistics Finland, EU Presidency, European Commission (figures for 2004)



Thanks and good luck!

This is the last *Network News* for which **Vincent Forest** was responsible, after 10 years as Information Officer with EAPN. In July, Vincent has taken up his new post as Head of the EU Office of Front Line, an international organisation defending human rights activists. On behalf of EAPN I wish to take this opportunity to thank Vincent for his tremendous work and professionalism over the 10 years he has been with us and to wish him all the best in his exciting and challenging new role.

Fintan Farrell
Director of EAPN

Surf to us at...

WWW.eapn.org

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Everybody deserves an adequate minimum income, capable of ensuring a dignified life

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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



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