



## EAPN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2006 –FINAL DECLARATION

### The EU We Want

On 5-7 October 2006, EAPN held its seventeenth General Assembly in Toledo, Spain. This year the key note theme was: "The EU We Want". This theme reflects the view of EAPN members that the European Union needs to fundamentally re-think its economic and social policy if it is to achieve its stated objective '*to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty' by 2010*'

At this General Assembly the Network welcomed into its membership the **Lithuania Anti Poverty Network**, the **European Network Against Racism (ENAR)**, the **European Foundation for Street Children** and **SMES Europa**.

At the end of the General Assembly, the delegates adopted the following declaration.

We the representatives of NGOs working with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion across the European Union, demand that the leaders of the EU balance the progress made in market and economic integration with **cooperation to guarantee access for all to high levels of social standards and fundamental rights**. In spite of the aspirations expressed in Lisbon (2000) and elsewhere, the EU is still far from reaching the vision of a social Europe. Delegates noted:

1. Official EU figures show that **72 million people live their daily lives in or at risk of poverty** in the EU Member States. As well as the risks associated to this reality for the people directly concerned; poor health, homelessness or inadequate housing, lack of access to education, precarious and often dangerous employment, limited recreational or holiday opportunities etc, this reality also represents a threat to the cohesiveness of European society. Despite the seriousness of the threat involved the strategy proposed by the Heads of States and Governments to address this reality and to "make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by the year 2010" receives little high level political attention. **We demand that the Heads of States and Governments actively promote social cohesion and the eradication of poverty**. We expect that the fight against poverty will be mainstreamed into the activities carried out during the European Year of Equal Opportunities for all (2007).
2. Already this year over **3000 people have died trying to reach the territory of the EU**. Those, adults and children who do survive and reach the territory of the EU, are faced with detention, inadequate supports and high levels of stress, both mental and physical. We demand a European Union where the Member States cooperate to ensure that all **asylum and immigration policies fully respect fundamental rights**. We are particularly concerned at the increasing 'externalisation' of migration polices which has the potential to undermine asylum and humanitarian protection. Member States must fully realise their responsibility under the Geneva

Convention relating to the status of Refugees to ensure that returned migrants are not subject to death, torture or other threats in the "re-admitting" country. At the same time as concern is raised about this 'illegal immigration' European economies are exhibiting increasing levels of **demand for labour**. The migration policies adopted by the EU and the Member States in this regard must provide for the proper integration of migrant workers, respond to the reality of the 6-8 million undocumented migrants already living in Europe, and comply with the ILO objectives of '**decent work**'. In addition the EU must ensure a **broader reflection on the causes of migration** including; the impact of the failure of wealthy countries to meet their development aid target of 0.7% of GDP, the failure to address the trafficking of immigrants, in particular women immigrants, for exploitation in domestic care and in the sex industry, and the failure to develop socially responsible globalisation.

3. EAPN welcomes the debate at EU level about what has become known as '**flexicurity**' but is concerned that it is unbalanced due to an over emphasis on 'flexibility' and by the failure to adequately recognise that to date such policies have failed to reach those far from the labour market. In addition the evidence is that despite the change of rhetoric, the political goal is still very much determined by the needs of employers and the perceived need to flexibilise labour law, accompanied by 'make work pay' and 'activation' policies aimed at putting pressure on the unemployed to take jobs which are characterised by low pay, precariousness and often unhealthy working conditions, with little chances for further training or personal development. We want to see a commitment to the balanced development of this concept including sufficiently extensive welfare systems to support the security aspect of the model. We want to see an EU where having a **high level of social protection is seen as a value in its own right** and not just a tool for labour market integration and where **well-designed activation programmes, which do not involve compulsion**, assist people in the transition from social assistance to decent work, while responding to their real aspirations and the need to lift people out of poverty.
4. The trend towards wholesale **deregulation of services of general interest** with scant regard for the social consequences continues within the EU. In Member States where the electricity and gas markets have been "liberalised", people experiencing poverty and those on low incomes are prey to serious difficulties. Yet this trend continues and is likely to continue in areas as diverse as water, health and social services. We want to see an EU where the **protection, regulation and distribution of "basic" goods and services that are essential to live a decent life** are not only subject to 'market freedoms' but **are seen and respected as social rights and a rich part of our cultural heritage** and of the European Social Model.
5. The annual **European meetings of people experiencing poverty**, organised by successive EU Presidencies, while being important in their own right, are not sufficient. They have to be reinforced by genuine participatory approaches adopted at all levels and by all actors, including a strong engagement in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the National Action Plans for Inclusion.

2010, which has been designated as the **EU Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion**, will also mark the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of EAPN. The delegates to the General Assembly

called on all those responsible for the planning of the year to ensure that it is built on lessons learned from the Open Method of Cooperation on social inclusion and on a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the Lisbon Agenda on the fight against poverty. This year should contribute to an EU where **the voice of people experiencing poverty is heard** and should mark a turning point towards the development of the "EU We Want". An EU that in the words of article 3 of the proposed Constitutional Treaty "shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child" The **delegates to the General Assembly expressed their commitment to continue to contribute to the development of this Social Europe.**