

Network news



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Editorial

Put poverty and social exclusion at the heart of the EU agenda!

It's official....16% of Europeans remain at risk of poverty and 10% are in jobless households, according to the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, presented by Commissioner Spidla on the 20 February 2007. Even more shocking is that these figures have hardly changed, or in some case have deteriorated, since the beginning of the Lisbon Strategy. The continuation of such high relative poverty figures across the EU is a sign of the failure of public policy to redistribute the fruits of growth and to promote a more equal society.

The EU must acknowledge that it is failing to deliver on eradicating poverty and social exclusion and must return to making this the principal focus of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and of the broader Lisbon Strategy. Effective strategies to fight poverty have to start by examining the causes of poverty and be based on fundamental rights. Although helping people to access decent jobs is one essential element, this must be underpinned by a commitment to provide an adequate income for all, enabling them to live a dignified life, and access to quality services, regardless of employment status.

Comprehensive strategies for tackling poverty must therefore confront the need to tackle inequality, as well as addressing all of the key priorities which have been identified in the social inclusion process. To achieve this, steps must be taken to give the OMC teeth and to strengthen its role within the overall Lisbon Strategy.

Fintan Farrell
EAPN Director

FOCUS ON POVERTY IN THE EU AGENDA

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What do the National Strategies (2006-8) deliver for people living in poverty? An EAPN assessment¹

The best is yet to come!

The Lisbon Strategy was based on three pillars: competitiveness, more and better jobs and social inclusion. Recently the focus of the strategy has shifted to jobs and growth, resulting in the dominance of a narrow economic perspective.

The key documents, representing key stages in the revised strategy, are:

- “National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion”, and at European level the annual “Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion”. These strategies are supposed to contribute to the jobs and growth agenda (“feeding in”).
- “National Reform Programmes” based on integrated guidelines for macro and micro economics and employment, and at the European level the “Annual Progress Report”. The Spring Council conclusions are based on this report and are supposed to show how the overall strategy is contributing to social cohesion (“feeding out”).

To date the reality is that there is a strong focus on “feeding in” with little effort to achieve a corresponding “feeding out”. The outcome is that 6 years later, EAPN members are highlighting increasing levels of poverty, erosion of right-based approaches and declining confidence in the ability of our political institutions to safeguard social cohesion. An EU that wants to be close to its citizens must respond to this reality and therefore we can only hope that the best is yet to come!

Fintan Farrell, EAPN Director

In 2006 the EU inclusion strategy was ‘streamlined’ at European level, bringing together social inclusion, pensions, and health and long term care, into a single EU strategy called the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. This strategy interacts with the Lisbon Strategy showing how social policy can be a productive factor (‘feeding in’), and the Lisbon strategy is supposed to show how it is contributing to social cohesion (‘feeding out’).

The preparation of National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (National Reports) within which National Action Plans on Social Inclusion remain a distinct feature is a central part of this strategy. This article summarises EAPN’s views on the inclusion part of the first round of National Reports.

Policy measures reported in the National Reports

Most National Reports address issues to do with: Child poverty (early years intervention plus childcare), Education (school drop out and life long learning), Unemployment (low skills), Activation (linked to conditionality) and Quality services (service adequacy and sustainability). In addition many of the national reports also focus on elderly dependency and the need to address issues to do with homelessness.

Gender equality is addressed in the National Reports, but mainly in terms of women’s opportunities to work. Although migrant’s issues are reported, the most common actions are concerned with language training. For the Roma some multi-dimensional strategies are reported. The situation of ethnic minorities is poorly addressed in most reports.

The multidimensional approach to poverty policy is not consistently addressed. For example, family policy is often focused on the responsibilities of family members for family behaviour or care, but there is less emphasis on state family support measures. Housing policy rarely addresses the

need for large scale building of affordable housing. Finally, there is little said about the public awareness and understanding of poverty which will have to be addressed if governments are to gain ‘permission’ from the electorate to redistribute resources in favour of combating poverty and social exclusion.

Although EAPN networks generally feel that the measures in their National Reports are not sufficient to combat poverty effectively, most networks reported good measures and some networks (France, Portugal, Malta, Sweden,) believe the measures are going in the right direction. However, some networks believed the measures are better on paper than in practice (Poland, Netherlands) while others thought the measures reported were too generalised (Germany, Austria.)

Measures in National Reports are not sufficient to combat poverty effectively

What are the policy priorities in the National Reports?

The Commission in its draft Joint Report 2007² identifies two key priorities

from the National Reports, child poverty and active inclusion. The draft Joint Report does mention other priorities and it is hoped that the priorities established previously including in the March 2005 EPSCO council³ are not forgotten.

Given the reality that children are more likely than adults to live in poverty EAPN agrees that it is essential to address child poverty. However, national networks are concerned about what lies behind the potential narrowing of the focus from poverty to child poverty. Comments from networks included ‘You don’t get many rich children in poor families’; ‘Children’s behaviour is not the cause of poverty’

EAPN Networks fear that the focus on child poverty may be a signal that governments want to shift away from support for strategies that are based on universal social protection – including for single adults, towards strategies that refocus responsibility onto the individual families. EAPN Networks have still not fully appreciated the difference between the use of the term ‘active inclusion’ and employment

1. This article is based on an article first published in the newsletter (no 4) of the OASI project (www.oasi-eu.org) written by Katherine Duffy, President, EAPN Review Group on Social Inclusion.

2. The final version of the Joint Report should be agreed at the EPSCO council in February 2007

3. http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/lsa/84176.pdf

'activation'. Thus many Networks are frustrated with what they see as the increasing imposition of compulsive activation measures which do not necessarily improve the situation of people living in poverty. As the respondent from one network asked – 'what happened to SOCIAL inclusion?' In addition Networks believe that there are few strong measures for those who cannot get jobs on the open market and many networks would like also to see more measures to promote jobs in the social economy. Other than in the Finnish National Report there is little reflection on whether current labour markets have the capacity to absorb all those who want to work.

The Commission's more holistic understanding of active inclusion as presented in their recent communication⁴, which sees 'active inclusion' as being more than about employment, combining a balance between adequate income, access to quality services and employment activation, is not reflected in most national reports. Overall, EAPN national networks want to see more political energy directed to combating poverty and exclusion and recognition that social policy tools will not be enough to address poverty and that other policies, in particular economic policies, must play their part.

Governance of the Strategy

All Member States claim to have some or all of the following institutional mechanisms to prepare the National Reports, in particular the Inclusion chapters: co-ordination units, inter-departmental committees, national meetings and stakeholder mechanisms. In addition, some states have regional mechanisms as well (Hungary, Latvia). However, mechanisms for monitoring and implementation are little mentioned.

EAPN believes that the following areas are under-developed in the governance process:

- Involvement of national and European Parliament.
- Involvement of regional and local levels.
- The impact of the National Reports on the Lisbon strategy.
- The 'mobilisation of actors' objective is in practice limited to the Inclusion dimension.

The involvement of people experiencing poverty is limited

- Involvement of people experiencing poverty is limited

EAPN National networks believe that positive aspects in governance are:

- Ability to contrast Member States' strategies and policies
- Consistent follow up on thematic approaches have allowed cross national learning by governments and other actors.
- More structured access to policy makers for NGOs and others
- EAPN's social and European expertise is more recognised nationally

However, it is clear that there is a wide variation across the Member States in the degree to which there is a serious effort to invest in a truly Open Method of Coordination. While a 'name and shame' approach has been deemed to be unhelpful, the future Joint Reports must report more clearly on the extent to which Member States have sought to engage all relevant actors in the process.

Conclusions

The reality, 6 years after the introduction of the Lisbon Strategy as viewed by EAPN members, is that the level of poverty and inequality has increased in most countries, rights-based approaches are under pressure and confidence is declining in the ability of our political institutions to safeguard social cohesion. It is difficult to have hard statistical evidence to back up this view but what evidence does exist in terms of EUROSTAT, national statistics, numbers of working poor etc. tends to confirm these views.

However, EAPN members are convinced that this reality is not a reason to abandon the existing processes, but rather that it is time to step up a gear in the fight against poverty. Only then will the words in the conclusions of the 2006 Spring Council that "the Lisbon Strategy is at the service of social cohesion" have real meaning.

EAPN wants to see the Spring Summit of 2007 emphasise again the European will to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010.

Sian Jones
EAPN Policy office



Source : EC

POVERTY RATES IN EUROPE 2000 – 2004

	2000	2004
Allemagne	10	13
Autriche	12	12
Belgique	13	15
Chypre	:	16
Danemark	:	12
Espagne	18	20
Estonie	18	18
Irlande	20	20
Finlande	11	12
France	16	13
Grèce	20	20
Hongrie	11	13
Italie	18	19
Lettonie	16	19
Lithuanie	17	21
Luxembourg (GD)	12	13
Malte	15	15
Pays-Bas	11	11
Pologne	16	21
Rép. Tchèque	:	10
Royaume-Uni	19	19
Roumanie	17	18
Slovénie	11	12
Slovaquie	:	13
Suède	:	9
UE 25	16	16

Source : SILC (2005) - Income year 2004 (income year 2005 for Ireland and the United Kingdom); except for Bulgaria and Romania - estimates based on the national Household Budget Survey.

The Open Method of coordination: towards an effective tool against poverty?

To strengthen the Open Method of coordination (OMC) as an effective strategic tool against poverty, EAPN is calling for the following specific changes:

- An evaluation of the impact of streamlining on the attention given to poverty;
- A cross cutting working group on poverty within the Commission in which NGOs could play a part;
- Higher status for the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and stakeholder involvement in its preparation;
- A focus on all and not only on the two key priorities identified in the Joint Report;
- Mainstreaming of poverty and social inclusion concerns in the Health and Pensions strands of the streamlined process;
- Strengthened engagement of National Parliaments and sub-national levels governments;
- Effective monitoring of the implementation of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion;
- The launch of "legacy planning" for the National Action Plans to ensure there will be output and impact for the 2010 EU Year Against Poverty.

Where do poverty-related issues stand in the EU agenda? Interview with Jerome Vignon, Director in DG Employment in charge of social protection and inclusion policies

E APN : EAPN is concerned about the fact that the commitment to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty appears to have almost disappeared from the Lisbon process?

Jérôme Vignon : Well, I am also concerned that your perception is so negative, though I can understand why you should have this impression. But on the contrary, I think we are now entering a phase which offers us many opportunities.

The trend seems to be changing. I am sure that there is going to be some significant strengthening of the social pillar at the upcoming European Council meetings.

The Commission – not least with its Social Stocktaking review – is keen on listening to views about how to ensure access and opportunities for all. We have to work together with civil society and with the social partners to secure the place of social inclusion and social protection in the next Lisbon cycle for 2008-2011, not only as a productive factor but also as a commitment per se.

How would you do that?

The delivery mechanisms of the Lisbon strategy at a national level need to facilitate the active involvement of Social Affairs Ministries to ensure a more social perspective. EAPN networks are in a very strong position to relay these concerns. Of course, the Commission and civil society do not have the same role.

NGOs like EAPN must deliver clear messages based on your contacts with people living in poverty and with organizations working on the ground.

Nobody else can do that. I feel it is important that the whole Social Inclusion and Social Protection OMC is not subsumed in the Lisbon process, as this would risk narrowing its scope.

We need especially to insist on the "feeding out" dimension, where jobs and growth strategies have to show how they support the priorities on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The German and future Portuguese Presidencies this year have expressed strong and positive views on this issue. The Round Table in Portugal this year could be a key moment, especially as it is also the 10th anniversary of Portugal's own minimum income scheme.

How do you view the current developments in the debate on Flexicurity?

It is clear that there are huge differences of opinion across Member States on the extent to which labour law should be made more flexible. Improving the overall quality of fixed-term contracts or part-time jobs will be a key issue. We currently have a debate between those pushing for more quality employment, adequate levels of unemployment benefits and up front social security and those afraid of creating more fiscal burdens.

I am not critical about this debate. I think that if flexicurity ensures adequate income and proper support and guidance as part of a positive activation approach, then it can be a useful concept.

I also would emphasize that the Commission's concept of Active Inclusion, which argues for a combined approach of activation, an adequate income for a dignified life and access to quality social services, complements the vision of flexicurity, as it takes into account also the situation of those for whom work is not a solution to the challenge of exclusion.

What is your perception of EAPN's impact on EU social policies?

EAPN is a vital partner, especially in the Open Method of Coordination on Social Inclusion, as part of the streamlined process. However, there is unequal strength of members in various Members

States in particular with regards to the way they reflect the EU level. It's vital that EAPN's national networks do not forget the EU dimension.

The meetings of People Experiencing Poverty co-organized by EAPN have a strong political value. Ministers who have attended these meetings have been strongly influenced, and that impacts on how they engage in Council meetings and in the planning and follow up of these meetings. In particular, the EAPN has been a key element in ensuring continuity in the political commitment to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. In that sense, it is fundamental from the perspective of the European integration process, which goes beyond the fluctuations of political moods.

What about the preparations for 2010 EU Year against Poverty?

The Commission is now starting to prepare the year and we will be launching a consultation exercise shortly, to ensure that we understand what all the stakeholders want from the Year. Our proposal should then be adopted before the next Round Table on poverty and social exclusion in October.



Jérôme Vignon

Our initial thinking is that, to secure ownership at national level, the decisions about the types of events will be left to the Member States and their partners, but with a strong role left for the EU level to bring these initiatives together. We would want to see the year as an opportunity for awareness raising, but also to embed a stronger commitment to the fight against poverty. We will need to work in close cooperation with the European Anti Poverty Network when

it comes to giving a strong national focus to the Year.

Only a strong involvement of civil society will make the year against poverty a success.

Interview : A. Gueudet

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

WHAT IS STREAMLINING?

In March 2006, the European Council adopted a new framework for the social protection and social inclusion process, bringing together under common objectives the existing Open Methods of Coordination (OMC) in the fields of social inclusion and pensions and the process of co-operation in the field of health and long term care.

The overarching objectives of the streamlined OMC for social protection and social inclusion are to promote:

social cohesion, equality between men and women and equal opportunities for all through adequate, accessible, financially sustainable, adaptable and efficient social protection systems and social inclusion policies;

Effective and mutual interaction between the Lisbon objectives of greater economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and with the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy;

Good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy.

Why streamlining? The Commission proposed to «streamline» the work on inclusion and pensions, together with the planned work on health and long-term care, to form an integrated process, as far back as May 2003. The aim was twofold: to create a stronger, more visible OMC with a heightened focus on policy implementation, which will interact positively with the revised Lisbon Strategy, while simplifying reporting and expanding opportunities for policy exchange.

In 2006, the EU Member states submitted their first streamlined National strategy reports on social protection and social inclusion.

For more information on streamlining and related documents:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/objectives_en.htm

How is streamlining seen by European organisations?

AGE (the European Older People's Platform) and FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) share their views on the streamlined 2006-2008 National Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

A

AGE: "More concrete proposals are needed"

In the latest national reports, AGE has identified some key concerns regarding both the reporting mechanism and the policy content.

Streamlined Reporting Mechanism

Although the reports are less descriptive and have a more strategic approach than in the past, AGE regrets that many reports are still simple updates on existing programmes and policies rather than real plans on how to deal with the problems identified.

The streamlined framework is often not reflected in the reporting process and the links between social inclusion, social protection, and health and long-term care processes are missing. This seems to demonstrate a lack of external and internal co-ordination between the various ministries involved in drafting the reports.

Policy Content

Although surveys in the EU reveal that older people are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the rest of the population, only few national reports identify them as a target group.

In last year's national reports, a number of issues received too little attention:

- risk of poverty linked to moving from State pension to 2nd and 3rd pillar schemes
- pensioners poverty, in particular, older women and older migrants
- pension indexation
- the use of means testing
- accessibility to health and long-term care for the most vulnerable.
- family carers

F

FEANTSA: "Tackling homelessness emerges as a key priority"

FEANTSA has seen the emergence of tackling homelessness and improving access to decent housing as key priorities for the EU social inclusion strategy. The recently submitted National Reports of the 27 EU countries confirm this trend and demonstrate the following:

- Homelessness and access to decent housing are still key priorities for the EU member states;
- The need for **urgent action** in providing access to decent and affordable housing, and the need to prevent different forms of homelessness and housing exclusion from increasing in Europe;
- The **huge potential** for learning on policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion given that many EU countries are in the process of developing or revising policies in this area;
- **Housing has emerged as an important pillar** of the EU social inclusion and social protection strategy, namely as an essential element of social welfare in many countries;
- Some homelessness strategies presented in the latest National Reports 2006-2008 also strengthened the health and **employment** dimensions.

FEANTSA recommendations for taking forward the social inclusion process:

Even though some progress has been made in the way older people-related issues are presented and dealt with in the last reports, AGE calls for more concrete proposals and a clear implementation timetable. All this is crucial to ensure that the streamlined reporting will not become a mere bureaucratic exercise.

Maciej Kucharczyk
AGE Policy Officer

- It is important to create clear mutual learning processes around the societal problems covered under the strategy if the EU is to have a genuine impact on alleviating poverty.
- FEANTSA proposes to facilitate transnational exchanges between different actors in the field by using its expertise and contacts to foster cooperation between different levels of government and partners involved in the fight against homelessness. FEANTSA calls on other thematic networks to follow suit.

Liz Gosme
FEANTSA Policy Officer



www.age-platform.org

From nowhere to...somewhere. Participation by all actors in Belgium's NAP/Incl 2006-2008.

Civil society's input to developing Belgium's Social Protection and Inclusion NAPs is often hailed as an example of participation in action. But EAPN Belgium has spent 6 years getting there.

A fairly shambolic start
EAPN Belgium felt betrayed by the means chosen to develop the first Belgian National Action Plan on social inclusion (NAP/Inclusion) in 2001. Even though the 4th objective of the Social Inclusion Strategy agreed in Nice in 2000 called for the "mobilisation of all relevant actors", civil society was given no hand in the process at all. The Belgian government even owned up to this in the introduction to the first NAP, pledging to do better next time.

The second NAP/Inclusion (2003) brought further disappointment for EAPN Belgium. Despite some improvement, with a Task Force on Measures set up to follow-up on the 300-odd measures included in the NAP, there was dead silence from civil society. EAPN Belgium was the only non-governmental organisation to work alongside the Belgian State's 6 tiers of government in developing the second national action plan.

A gradual awakening...

In a bid to assess the first two NAPs, the Belgian federal government then set up a day conference

with all the actors envisaged in the Nice 4th objective. This showed that most were unaware of the existence or contents of the NAP, but were keen to be involved in developing it. EAPN Belgium took the opportunity to float a new operating procedure for the Measures Task Force, and a better means of developing the next NAP Social Inclusion, now dubbed the NAP or Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The Social Inclusion agency took over the proposal, which was approved by the Interdepartmental Conference on Social Inclusion.

As early as November 2005, we started the groundwork on the NAP Social Protection and Social Inclusion which was due for submission to the European Commission in September 2006. A first meeting of the new style Measures Task Force went ahead with civil servants from the 6 governments and all the actors concerned to set the priorities of the new NAP. At the end of this, in early July 2006, we jointly drew up the substantive text for submission to the Interdepartmental Conference for final approval.



www.feantsa.org



Family picture :
5th European meeting of people experiencing poverty

5th meeting of people experiencing poverty calls for more participation in the EU Social Inclusion process

"We have something to offer them (policy-makers). They need us to get in touch (with realities). With us, they can make better laws".
SWEDEN

At the occasion of the 5th meeting of people experiencing poverty which took place 12-13 May 2006 in Brussels, participants urged decision makers at all levels to extend and deepen the participation of people experiencing poverty and NGOs representing them in the preparation and monitoring of the National Actions Plans for Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

"It must go beyond just public meetings to actual involvement in drafting and negotiation", they said. "A strong emphasis in the NAPs should be investing in empowering people to take charge of their own lives."

Some positive examples of NGOs being involved in the drawing up of the NAPs/inclusion in several countries such as Poland, UK and Belgium were highlighted. It was suggested that to increase effective participation in the future, training on participation techniques should be organized for civil servants responsible for the NAPs.

See:

Report of the 5th meeting of people experiencing poverty: http://www.eapn.org/code/en/publ_detail.asp?pk_id_content=2140

Report of the 2nd meeting of people experiencing poverty (focused on participation): http://www.eapn.org/code/en/publ_detail.asp?pk_id_content=684

What are the challenges for the future?

The Measures Task Force has continued to meet at the same intervals. Although too infrequently for us, these meetings do enable us to keep the NAP under review, and keep our work fixed on a future course.

The current system is already a big improvement over the first NAP Social Inclusion period, and we are gratified that it can be seen elsewhere in Europe as an example of good practise.

And yet, the Belgian government has still not done anything about the basic

The Belgian government has still not done anything about the basic requirements for people experiencing poverty to be fully involved

requirements for people experiencing poverty to be fully involved in this preparation, follow-up and evaluation process. What are they? Working at their pace, but also addressing their needs for support to enable them to become full actors on their own basis. EAPN Belgium has repeatedly called on the Minister for Social Inclusion, whose job it is to coordinate the social inclusion strategy, to give voluntary organizations the means to tool up for the process properly. Concrete plans have been put to him, but have so far been ignored.

Ludo Horemans
EAPN Belgium

Lisbon fails to ensure labour participation for migrants and ethnic minorities

Migrants and ethnic minorities still face widespread discrimination in EU's labour markets.

While the social pillar of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs aims to combat social exclusion, Member States have been slow to implement necessary measures to combat discrimination in employment.

Following review of the 2006 National Reform Programmes (NRPs), it is the view of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) that these initiatives fail to adequately address the discrimination faced by migrant and minority groups. Many barriers to employment faced by these groups are in large part due to multi-sector patterns of discrimination. Endeavors to promote 'growth and employment in Europe within a framework of social cohesion and sustainability', must address these complex patterns if they are to effectively promote participation through equal opportunity in the labour market.

The NRPs submitted by the Member States were generally weak in addressing discrimination faced by these groups. With respect to minority groups in particular, many reports were fully devoid of

any mention, namely those of Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia and Malta. Of the reports that mentioned discrimination specific to both groups, very few did so in a manner reflective of the policy-mainstreaming necessary to effectively address these issues. Two reports that came close to achieving this were those of the United Kingdom and Denmark; though Denmark's report dealt only with migrants.

Civil society groups working on the ground report serious consequences. In Portugal, for example, many Roma communities live off of street trading and in shocking situations of social exclusion. Integration measures have not secured conditions necessary for labour participation by this group. A lack of awareness concerning Roma communities on the part of policy-makers results in inflexible measures that do not address integration needs. Employers' discriminatory practices exacerbate the problem. The Portuguese NRP contains no mention of Roma and only one brief mention of minorities in 47 pages.

In Ireland, to cite another example, minority groups experience discrimination in accessing employment and while employed. Manifestations include underemployment, poorer working terms and conditions and unequal opportunities to promotion. Asylum seekers do not have the right to work; a situation that NGOs and independent research highlight as having a negative impact on integration and personal health.

The Irish NRP mentions immigrants only twice in 58 pages and measures mentioned addressing minorities, in particular the Traveller community, are not described in specific terms.

In ENAR's view, deficiencies exhibited in the NRPs reflect a lack of effective mainstreaming of these issues

Barriers to employment faced by migrants and ethnic minorities are in large part due to multi-sector patterns of discrimination

in the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs. Guideline No.18 (promotion of a life-cycle approach to work), speaks of discrimination indirectly: 'Combating discrimination and promoting access to employment for disabled people, and integrating immigrants and minorities are particularly essential'. Nonetheless, mention of discrimination amounts to two sentences in 36 pages and none of the 24 guidelines focus directly on employment or labour market discrimination. Its not surprising thus, that the NRPs lack the policy-mainstreaming necessary to effectively address barriers to participation of migrant and minority groups in the labour market.

Stefanie Ligori

ENAR Policy officer

<http://www.enar-eu.org/en/>



Source: EC



FROM LISBON TO LISBON – BACK TO LISBON AND TO SOCIAL INCLUSION

The European Anti-Poverty Network / Portugal (REAPN), in partnership with the Portuguese Government, is organising an event called "From Lisbon to Lisbon". This initiative will have its most important moment during a European meeting (9th and 10th of March) of different experts in the field of poverty and social exclusion trying to come up with a set of proposals in order to help the upcoming Portuguese Presidency of the European Union to reinforce the Social Inclusion strand and the social inclusion strategy within the European Union present and futures agendas.

Six years after the setting up of the so-called Lisbon Strategy and looking back into past commitments and achievements, the reality is that 72 million people in the EU are still facing the burden of poverty and social exclusion, with little evidence of significant changes in this situation.

In this context, EAPN Portugal identified as major worries: the weak progresses achieved in the promotion of the social inclusion and an European approach of it; the attention and the focus on "Growth and Jobs" as a pre-condition for reducing poverty and social exclusion, and the loss of priority of the social cohesion strand in the framework of the revised Lisbon Strategy (2005); and the debate about Social Protection and the future of the European Social Model, in the scope of the enlargement of the Union and the European Strategy for Social Inclusion, which is in "stand-by".

The results of this conference will be presented in the next edition of Network News

Sérgio Aires & Jordi Estivill

Co-ordinators of the initiative "From Lisbon to Lisbon"

See EAPN Portugal's website:

<http://www.reapn.org/>

Statutory minimum wages varied by one to eleven across the EU in January

2006

In January 2006, eighteen of the 25 Member States of the EU had national legislation setting statutory minimum wages. Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy and Sweden don't have minimum wages set by national legislation and applicable to the majority of full-time salaried workers in each country (Other minimum wages may exist for certain categories within the country, e.g. based on age, physical or mental capacities, or economic state of the business).

Looking at the level of the minimum wage in euro, Member States fell into three broad groups. In Latvia (129), Lithuania (159), Slovakia (183), Estonia (192), Poland (234), Hungary (247) and the Czech Republic (261), minimum wages were below 300 euro per month in January 2006. Portugal (437), Slovenia (512), Malta (580), Spain (631) and Greece (668) fell into a middle group, with minimum wages of between 400 and 700 euro per month. In France (1 218), Belgium (1 234), the United Kingdom (1 269), the Netherlands (1 273), Ireland (1 293) and Luxembourg (1 503) minimum wages were over 1 200 euro per month.

The level at which these were set varied widely, from 129 euros per month in Latvia to 1 503 euros per month in Luxembourg. It should be noted that the proportion of employees receiving the minimum wage also differs greatly between Member States, ranging from less than 1% in Spain to 18% in Luxembourg.

These figures are published by Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the

The “combination wage” and minimum wage in Germany – state of play

Reform of the labour market in 2005

The social legislation was modified in Germany in January 2005: The German social welfare agency was merged with the unemployment benefits fund by the Hartz IV Act. Since that time, a claimant is entitled to receive full unemployment benefits during the first twelve months. After this period, the system changes and the claimant is only entitled to the so-called “unemployment benefits II”, which amounts to the equivalent of social benefits. In most of cases, these benefits are lower than the unemployment benefits a person was entitled to before the reform of the labour market in 2005.

Since that time, Germany has had a “combination wage” system whereby an unemployment benefit claimant must accept any job offered to him or be penalized.

This has produced more than enough potential candidates for even very low-paid jobs, who can then combine their low earned income with unemployment benefit. Since part of their earnings is discounted in calculating supplementary benefit, the maximum combination wage that can be received is €10 above the new-style unemployment benefit for families with children, and €80 above for childless families.

Approximately 3 million people in work theoretically qualify for supplementary benefits. In 2006, only a third claimed them. But the figures are expected to go up. At present, up to 400 000 recipients are also in full-time employment, but most are part-time or low-paid workers.

A system under pressure

The government is concerned about this trend and the costs it entails, however. The system also has its limits, as workers very often take only the jobs that will just qualify them for the scheme.

The trade unions are also concerned that employers may use the combination wage scheme to depress wages, because a worker on a combination wage who gets €00 less in pay will often only

lose €20 in take-home pay. The unions argue that the Hartz IV Act combination wage scheme is an added obstacle in the way of any improvement in wage rates. They believe that a legal minimum wage is needed to halt this downward pressure on earned incomes and avoid any social dumping.

“An across-the-board minimum wage will not do the job alone”

But it would be a big mistake to roll back the existing combination wage scheme in favour of an across-the-board minimum wage which, in the form previously proposed, would admittedly be enough to support a single person, but definitely not a one- or two-child family; bringing in a minimum wage without the combination wage could actually deepen child poverty.

A possible acceptable solution would be to introduce minimum wages that do not restrict the current combination wage schemes established under the Unemployment Benefits Act “Arbeitslosengeld II”. The combination wage and minimum wage are two cornerstones of labour market policy which help prevent in-work poverty.

Dr Rudolf Martens

Joint social welfare federation – general federation

“The introduction of minimum wages that do not restrict the current combination wage schemes would be an acceptable solution”

EAPN Bulgaria: A mix of successes and failures

The Bulgarian Anti Poverty Network was the first "accession" country network to join EAPN in 2003. We talked to Douhomir Minev, President of EAPN Bulgaria.

EAPN: How did the Bulgarian transition affect the work of social NGOs?

Douhomir Minev: The third sector in Bulgaria has developed out of the specific political, social and economic context. Throughout the 17 years of transition, its evolution has tracked the stages of public intervention.

The first stage of transition (up to 2000) was dominated by a large number of external, mainly non-EU, donor programmes, which resulted in countless isolated projects, intensive internal conflicts, low networking capacity, and a low level of civil society participation in the reforms. The state took a laissez-faire approach, while de-regulation left civic groups to their own devices in coping with the growing uncertainties.

The second period (post-2000) saw a modest return towards "re-socialization" of NGOs, reflected among other things in public-private partnerships, a community-based approach, promotion of NGOs as service providers, and restrictions of NGOs' advocacy and lobbying role. Regulation shows growing trends towards centralization of programmes, active promotion of government-friendly NGOs, resulting in their segregation, and ongoing deep rifts.

Even so, social NGOs have been trying to develop networking since the early days of transition. As far back as 1998, networking promoters were actively trying to support internal capacity-building by forging links with EU NGOs and networks. Since 2000, Bulgarian representatives have been able to engage with EAPN Europe's activities, providing the vital 'wind of change' from the Lisbon Agenda, and opportunities to familiarize themselves with and monitor EU practices in the field. These helped speed up the process towards getting the EAPN Bulgarian national Network established in 2003.

What form does EAPN Bulgaria take?

EAPN Bulgaria is made up of NGOs who share common values: the existence of poverty in Bulgaria is both unacceptable and unfitting in our expanding economy; policies must be poverty- and exclusion-proofed; poverty and social exclusion can only be tackled through active participation in decision making processes. Network NGOs work for and with different vulnerable groups (children, women, ethnic minorities, disabled, mentally ill, unemployed, etc.) and are engaged in a range of activities (lobbying, provision of information, service provision, research, etc.).

The Network has gained recognition on different fronts. Its representatives are involved in the work of senior national bodies (Economic and Social Council, Council on Mental Health, different Ministry of Labour and Social Policy working groups, etc.) and have had a hand in framing key national documents (JIM, National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, Operational Programme on "Human Resource Development", etc.).



What are the challenges still ahead?

Despite the positive developments, social NGOs in Bulgaria face enormous challenges in their efforts to positively influence national developments and transfer European-level skills and visions into national practices.

The achievements and weaknesses of EAPN Bulgaria reflect the evolutionary trend of social NGOs in a highly-fragmented society which is low on inclusiveness and public participation. There is a vital need to rethink the social dimensions of national policies, and increase social NGOs' involvement in developing, implementing and monitoring a real, far-reaching national anti-poverty strategy.

Interview: A. Gueudet

BULGARIA IN FIGURES

- Population (July 2005): 7,450,400 million
- At risk-of-poverty rate (income below 60% of the national median income) (2004): 15% (Men: 13; Women: 17; Children: 22)
- Total employment rate (2005): 55.8% (Men: 60; Women: 51.7)
- Unemployment rate (2005): 10.1% (Men: 10.3; Women: 9.8)
- Youth unemployment rate: 22.3% (15-24 years old)
- People living in jobless households (2006): 11.6% of adults (excluding students) and 14.5% of children

EU integration and poverty in Bulgaria

As the country just joined the EU, what is the state of poverty and social exclusion in Bulgaria?

On 1st of January, 2007, Bulgaria celebrated its EU membership. For 17 years already the EU integration is almost the only consensual aim amongst the Bulgarian society, connected with vital hopes for improvements and development. The country has experienced severe difficulties in its economic restructuring, based on weak democratic institutions, low level of citizenship and patchy legal framework in the years of transition. These resulted in immense social crises, including enormous fall (by 70%) in the living standards, high rates of poverty, unemployment, inequalities and emigration, intensive pressure on the social and economic rights, fragmentation and anti-solidarity.

Distorted privatization, over liberalization and deregulation dominated the first 10 years of transition and produced redundant people and resources instead of collective actions for public goods. Initiated and financed by the World Bank, reforms in healthcare and pension systems, social services provision and education followed the same lines and excluded large groups of people.

It was not till 2000-2002 when EU Inclusion Process and Lisbon Agenda started to play a role in the national landscape and gave more meaning to the social policy, changing its position in the political value system of society. The official unemployment rate decreased from 18% in 2002 to less than 10% in 2006.

Poverty and social exclusion have been officially recognised as problems in the Joint Memoranda on Social Inclusion (2004) and the National Action Plans. The evolving adjustment to the European processes was reflected in the National Development Plan (2005), recognizing that the country is with the highest level of poverty amongst the 27 Member States (the difference being 13 times) and including working poor amongst the vulnerable groups. Currently the social Minister undertakes efforts to adopt an offi-

cial poverty line, based on consumption of basic goods and services.

However, the National Reform Program (2006-2009) - more growth and jobs, (currently under elaboration) is again a step back. Following the revised Lisbon Agenda, it rarely mentions poverty and social exclusion, sets minimalist social aims and is based on the International Monetary Fund "trickle down" approach and further liberalization of services of general interest. The revised Lisbon strategy on the whole is perceived as boiling down to efforts concentrated on economic growth and focusing on labor market measures, often just representing financial support to business through government budget and EU funds.

In 2006 the monthly social pension was around 32€, the monthly minimum pension - 44€ and the monthly minimum salary – around 70€

Meanwhile the GDP in Bulgaria has constantly increased after 2002 (by 4% annually on average) and this has not resulted in any increase of basic incomes: in July 2006 the monthly social pension was around 32€, the monthly minimum pension - 44€, the monthly minimum salary – around 70€ and the monthly average salary – around 125€. For the whole period, data on subjective poverty depicts that around 80% of the population feel poor, while policies are more and more distant and do not provide clear vision of socially acceptable prospects.

Bulgaria badly needs a national anti-poverty strategy aimed at control and reduction of poverty generators and mechanisms of exclusion and an elaborated system of indicators to monitor developments. This should provide transparency and public monitoring and has to be based on a wide public support instead on vested interests, including socially consensual aims for the usage of Structural Funds.

Maria Jeliazkova
EAPN Bulgaria policy officer

Effective strategies to fight poverty have to start by examining the causes of poverty and be based on fundamental rights.

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Editor
F. Farrell

Responsible for publication
A. Gueudet

Rue du Congrès 37-41 bte2
B-1000 Bruxelles
tél. 32 2 230 44 55
fax 32 2 230 97 33
E-mail: team@eapn.skynet.be
Internet: <http://www.eapn.org>

Contributors
S. Jones
C. Flémal

Bureau de dépôt
1600 Sint Pieters Leeuw 1

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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