

Network news



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

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Editorial

Getting more participation by people experiencing poverty...

Participation by people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is a challenge that has grown over the years since EAPN was founded. In the late 1990s, EAPN along with other social NGOs pressed the European institutions for an anti-poverty policy that really delivers. This intensive lobbying resulted in the creation of the European Social Inclusion Strategy decided on at the Nice Summit in 2000. We set great store by Objective 4 of that strategy, which calls for all relevant bodies to be mobilised, especially people experiencing poverty. This objective has been restated in subsequent revisions of the strategy. Since then, much has been done to get these words reflected in actions.

The first European Meeting of people experiencing poverty was held in 2001 under the Belgian presidency of the EU at the instigation of the Belgian government, and in collaboration with EAPN. Over time, these meetings have turned into an EU Presidency/European Commission initiative, a development of major political significance. The meetings have gradually risen up the European authorities and Member States' agendas, and are now seen as a big policy event where the expertise of people experiencing poverty can be acknowledged ... an achievement that we have to build up and develop further in the years ahead.

Ludo Horemans
President of EAPN

FOCUS ON PARTICIPATION

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The European meetings of people experiencing poverty: driving the participatory agenda

The Lisbon European Council (2000) agreed to implement a European strategy in order to “make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty in Europe by 2010”; one of the strategies adopted - tackling poverty and social exclusion - is key to going forward with this commitment and must include all the stakeholders, including people who are experiencing poverty. Since 2003, EAPN has had a hand in organising the European meetings of people experiencing poverty.

A process going forward....

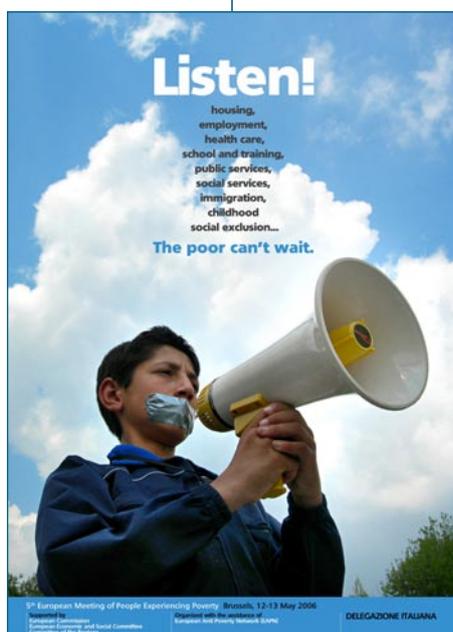
2001: The Belgian Government drew on its experience in participation since 1994 and capitalised on its Presidency of the European Union to launch the 1st European meeting of people experiencing poverty which reviewed four issues: housing, health, training and incomes. The big conclusion of this first event was that people experiencing poverty had the knowledge and expertise to analyse exclusion, and aimed to take part in society and the decisions that affect their life.

2003: In 2002, the Belgian Government suggested a 2nd Meeting - an initiative taken up by the Greek Presidency. EAPN was asked to prepare it, but time was short to carry out proper groundwork with the delegations. The topic was “good participation practices”. The preparations and workshops attempted to create models for participatory processes and a demand from the delegates: people experiencing poverty want to be able to talk face-to-face with policy-makers on policies that affect them. Responding to this demand, the Greek Presidency asked the June Council for the European Meetings to become a recurrent process, like the Social Inclusion Round Table.

2004: The topic chosen under the Irish Presidency reflected the demands that came out of the 2nd Meeting, and focused on dialogue between people experiencing poverty and policymakers under the title, “Participation is a two way street”. In a reversal of traditional roles, the “authorities” now became regarded as “guests” of the people experiencing poverty, and interfaced directly with the delegates in workshop discussions. The meeting concluded with an open forum between people experiencing poverty and a panel of policy-makers. A DVD made at the event provided a tool for extensive use to build awareness among national and regional policy makers.

2005: The Luxembourg Presidency chose to explore images and perceptions of poverty. A bigger focus is put on media productions - patchworks, paintings and photographs - brought in by people experiencing poverty. These creative endeavours were collected together into an exhibition staged at the Liverpool Round Table. A catalogue of the works was published. The Luxembourg Presidency showed the depth of its involvement by taking a powerful message to the June Council of Ministers, calling on all EU countries to organise the same kind of meeting. Many EAPN national networks gradually began to set up similar kinds of meetings at national and/or regional level.

2006: Preparations under the Austrian Presidency encompassed all aspects of poverty and social exclusion around the topic “How do we cope with everyday life?”. The groundwork done by the delegates revealed the proactivity and energy of people experiencing poverty. Each delegation of people experiencing poverty prepared a poster and presented it to the plenary session: it was an unforgettable highlight of the 5th Meeting. The



Define participation...

Four levels of participation were elaborated in the EU funded transnational project led by the Combat Poverty Agency Ireland, “Mainstreaming Social Inclusion”:

Information

Information and knowledge-sharing are essential to any involvement, because if full information (about policy initiatives) is not available and disseminated well beforehand, any form of consultation or participation is pointless.

Consultation

Consultation is about providing a process that gives a voice to the views of individuals and/or groups who are concerned by plans or want to have a say in a decision (which remains the prerogative of policy makers); the opinions collected will be heeded or discarded by the decision makers. Consultation can work only if those consulted have the relevant information.

Participation

Participation gives equal recognition to the input of all stakeholders in a decision-making process and it provides individuals and groups with the ability to be able to influence the process and to have their views incorporated in the final outcome.

Co-decision

Co-decision is an added stage which ensures that a consensus will be achieved in the decision-making process, that the policies will dovetail and reflect the concerns and priorities of everyone affected by the decisions, resulting in all the stakeholders having a joint ownership of the final outcome.

For full text, see: <http://www.europemsi.org/ta>

posters were collected into an exhibition staged at the Finland Round Table, in the Commission building in April 2007, and at the first National Meeting of people experiencing poverty in the United Kingdom in July 2007. The 5th meeting evaluation revealed a need to take stock of the first five Meetings.

2007: The 6th Meeting, under the German Presidency, decided to channel this priority through, and chose as the topic, "Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion: Progress made, future steps". It saw 130 delegates from 27 countries and 97 representatives of European and national authorities meeting on 4 and 5 May in Brussels. Delegates and guests gave the Meeting topic visual expression through symbolic objects. Without playing down the progress made on the social front, the delegates emphasized that the aim of eradicating poverty by 2010 is not being realistic and that there are clear signs that poverty is spreading. The 6th Meeting clearly showed that participatory processes are contributing to empowerment. It also identified that more joint work is being done by associations and public authorities, and reiterated the demand for ongoing dialogue at national level.

"Participatory processes are contributing to empowerment"

Building blocks of the process

-The centrality of people experiencing poverty: policymakers and officials come at their invitation.

-The demand by people experiencing poverty to engage in dialogue with policymakers. The 6th Meeting reported a more insistent demand for dialogue at the national level.

-The importance of regular meetings.

-The cascade effect: a growing number of EAPN national networks are holding national and/or regional meetings focused on participation and dialogue with political authorities and/or social workers.

-The further development of preparation for the annual meetings and follow-up to produce continuity.

-The publication of a Presidency Statement to the Council of Ministers builds Council awareness of the existence and spread of poverty, and the need to put participatory processes in place.

-The use of creativity (videos, posters, symbolic objects) to help give everyone a voice.

-Visibility:

- The Meeting reports are online on the EAPN website at www.eapn.org and the successive European Presidencies' websites.

- Involvement by a growing number of people in the preparation and follow-up of the European Meetings has helped engage the attention of national, regional and local policymakers, and the media on certain occasions.

- The production of a range of media tools: TV programmes, DVD, road movies, three exhibitions, a catalogue, cartoons.

- Complex processes materialized by the production of posters and symbolic objects.

Micheline Géronald

European Meetings Coordinator, EAPN

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

"I'm really pleased to have taken part in the sixth meeting. The organisation of these two days and the welcome given to people coming from the four corners of Europe were first-rate. The presentation of the three-dimensional objects by the different delegations and the workshop I took part in taught me that while we might all be European, and we all fundamentally want the same thing, poverty is not the same for all of us. And there is a job of work, because while these meetings have enabled progress to be made for the poorest since 2001, the gap between poor and rich is widening, low wages, welfare benefits, unemployment benefits, and low pensions don't enable the people on them to live decent lives". **Nicole Tonneau, French delegation participant**

"I took part in the European meeting as a hinge moment that could give meaning to what we were and what we did. What I took away from it was that we have big resources: we all come from different places and had different lives, but nobody looks away. I also met people from different Institutions who have never experienced poverty but we spoke with a single voice. I saw people who for the first time in their life understood what it meant to have the right to dignity. I also understood the real meaning of "participation". "Participation" means belonging to something: to ourselves, to our principles. Participating is about coming face to face with each other. It also means sharing the good and bad experiences, working with communities and involving decision-makers, but also addressing not just poverty but wealth and inequalities, too." **Oksana Bybliv, Italian delegation participant**

IN THEIR OWN WORDS ...

Jean-Claude Paris, user on the Community Life Council speaks:

“What this experience represents for me is the ability to say exactly what it feels like as an institution user.

The CVS is not just 10 elected members, it's also a team made up of residents, social workers, and staff. That makes it somewhere to learn respect for other people's differences and difficulties. This experience let me get back my self-confidence, show that I could express my thoughts, develop them and put my views across.

I learnt how to stand on my own two feet, with support from the others. That helped me open myself up to the others, trust them and in that way become a full member of a community. We learnt how to work together to build a consensus voice, and work out ways of celebrating citizenship.”

Participation: Good practices...

The Community Life Council (France)

The French Act of 2 January 2002 reforming the Welfare and Community Health Institutions Act 1975 brought a shift from institution-centred legislation to that focused on better rights for institution users.

On the 20th anniversary of the 1975 Act, voluntary agencies and the welfare inspectorate condemned users' lack of rights, called for a council to be set up in each institution, and other means provided for promoting users' rights relevant to the wide range of user group provision.

Community Life Councils (CVS) must be set up in all welfare and community health institutions, and be run as prescribed in a 2004 executive order. The main idea is to get a dialogue going between the different participants in a voluntary agency, including users. The CVS gives its opinion on the institution's plan, operating rules, the running of institutional activities, the organisation of daily life, work projects, etc...

The majority on the CVS is comprised of elected user representatives, staff and management representatives, a pillar of the wider community, and the head of the establishment.

The big issue with implementation of the CVS is the new allocation of powers it leads to in the institution (user/social worker; user/board of directors, user/management, etc...), creating widespread resistance at all levels of the voluntary agency. The CVS requires professionals to change their stance, promotes learning of joint working relationships, and helps promote citizenship by giving users empowerment and a voice.

*Olivier Marguery
Assistant General Manager, Salvation Army (France)*

Get Heard! (UK)

There are very few real opportunities for people living in poverty to influence social policies that affect their lives. But when chances for participation arise NGOs must be sure to take advantage of them.

The Get Heard! project in the UK came about because a range of NGOs, including the EAPN networks in the UK, seized the opportunity that the National Action Plan (NAP) on Social Inclusion process presented to support people in poverty influence key anti-poverty policies.

The success of the project lay in its simplicity. A toolkit was developed which was intended to encourage grassroots community groups to organise workshops which would then be fed into the development of the UK NAP Social Inclusion. The toolkit asked three simple questions: with respect to people's lives and communities what is working, what is not working and what needs to change? Over 18 months more than 140 groups across the UK took part in workshops.

Reading the UK NAP Social Inclusion it is clear that not all of the issues that people in poverty raised were addressed. It would have been unrealistic to expect that they would have. However, Get Heard has helped establish that people in poverty have a right to participate and that their contribution can significantly enhance anti-poverty policy. It has also shown that the barriers and obstacles to participation can be overcome if resources are made available and if organisations are committed to supporting people to raise their voices.

*Peter Kelly
EAPN UK*

*For more information on Get Heard visit
<http://www.ukcap.org/getheard/>*

Participation: How to avoid frustration!

For years now, a number of national governments and the European Commission have been proclaiming the importance of the participation of people experiencing poverty. An obvious example of this is the enthusiasm shown for the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty. This evolution in participation has reached different stages in different countries with important methods developed in some countries to give this participation shape.

In the collective process of participation it is acknowledged that poverty is no individual problem, but a societal one with many causes. Thus people living in poverty who engage in these processes can rid themselves of feelings of guilt about their situation and thus participation can contribute to their emancipation and empowerment.

This organised participation of people experiencing poverty helps to instigate inter-action with policymakers and other stakeholders. This should imply the improvement of anti poverty policies which in turn should improve the situation of those who are confronted with poverty. To achieve this people experiencing poverty are expected to deliver information about the complexity of their living situations.

What do we learn from these efforts of fostering participation of people experiencing poverty? Not astonishingly, we learn that problems do occur. After an initial period of enthusiasm (on all sides) some frustrations begin to appear. The dialogue meets with the complexity of the phenomenon of poverty and its alleviation, as well as the ambition of people experiencing poverty to be involved as a proper partner in all phases of the policy process.

The complexity of poverty policy is reflected in the need for cooperation across various policy areas and at various policy levels (EU, federal, regional, provincial and local). Thus the 'poor' people can

be sent from pillar to post unable to identify who exactly has the power to make the necessary decisions.

The ambition of the 'poor' to be involved in all phases of the policy process meets with the problem of the technical complexity of dossiers. The demand of permanent feedback to the target group or participants would moreover cause such delays that the bureaucratic process of policymaking would take an intolerable length of time.

Without addressing these realities participation can become an instrument to enhance frustrations or disappointments for all actors. To respond requires a deepening of participation methods. The objective of the enhancement of the quality of policies has to be considered more important than the 'instant but temporary good feeling' of

Without addressing certain realities participation can become an instrument to enhance frustrations or disappointments for all actors

'poor' people getting attention or a chair at the policy table. Thus government and institutional actors and their administrations must organise themselves in such a way that the information about life experiences through the participation process can act as a core input for poverty policies.

The key point is to avoid tearing apart this complex and coherent package of information into more manageable

information parts, particularly for governments and officials. Rather, a responsible coordination unit within the administrations needs to; support the participation process, gather and digest the received information and direct it to the right policy making processes. The process must also ensure the active involvement of elected politicians and to be successful needs elected politicians to champion this participation approach.

Let it be obvious that lots of work still have to be done by different actors. Let it be clear: you can't milk a cow with your hands in your pants.

Danielle Dierckx

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PARTICIPATION: SYMBOLIC OR REAL?

Participation is a holy word. Almost all of us active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion believe or at least pay lip service to the idea that people directly experiencing poverty and exclusion must be able to participate in decisions that affect their lives. This is great in theory, but how is it happening in practice? Is participation real or is it only symbolic?

Dignity International's "Get Up Stand Up" project in the poorest areas of Nairobi, Kenya, is teaching us a few lessons. For the participation to be real, it must be active, informed and meaningful. If the literacy level is low, popular methods must be used to communicate the contents. If meetings in large groups do not work for people to speak out, then try out smaller group or one-on-one consultations. If meetings in large halls don't work, try out the marketplace. People need to feel comfortable and their opinions respected.

When active participation happens in practice, the results are amazing. The wealth of wisdom, ideas, solutions, commitment, and energy simply pours out. The multiplier effect is electric. People turn out to gatherings in thousands, running them in their own way, with their own rhythm, setting their own agendas and priorities. Those who have struggled most for their daily survival are now clearly in charge. The Nairobi experience gives us hope for the future. The experience on the ground is teaching us to strive for participation that extends to leadership - participation that leads to empowerment - participation that translates into action and participation that can bring about lasting change.

Aye Aye Win

Executive Director, Dignity International

<http://www.dignityinternational.org>

Participation must be behind the European anti-poverty strategy

Participation by people experiencing poverty is fundamental to the European strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion.

The 3rd aim of that strategy links participation to policy mainstreaming to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. Participation by people experiencing poverty in the development of the National Action Plans on Inclusion varies between Member States. The European Meetings of people experiencing poverty show how powerful is the urge to participate.

In presenting a loud-hailer at the 6th meeting, the Social Protection Committee (SPC) was seeking to say that the voice of these people counts, that it must be heard and that we want to amplify it. These meetings have also taught us that the stereotype of poverty can be an obstacle to participation. The SPC wants to take hold of the structural causes of poverty and give full weight to the issues of those concerned.

One of the key conclusions of the EU 2007 joint report on social protection and social inclusion is that participation is on the rise. But it points out that more must be done to improve the quality of participation. The aims and conclusions tie up ... participation must be systematised to be effective. It should not be confined to policy formulation, but extend into policy evaluation and implementation. There is still a big job to do, but the results are encouraging, and decisive milestones have been passed. We must keep pressing forward.

Elise WILLAME

President of the Social Protection Committee

Participatory democracy: a prerequisite for policy action

Public participation in policy-making – sometimes called participatory democracy or civic participation – is an ill-defined idea, but is often demanded either to leverage the community's voice, or to improve policy action. While civic participation is clearly no panacea for all the ills of representative democracy, a real participation policy still needs to be devised as a joined-up system of tools that bring individuals officially into the policy-making loop.

Tools to be provided, stages to be followed

Bringing people back into the decision-making loop means getting individuals involved at all stages of project or policy implementation. It means going beyond just informing and consulting to forge a partnership relation between the participants.

A line-up of existing instruments to do that paves the way to joint policy-making and policy action. They need to strengthen politicians' adjudicatory role while also limiting their discretion to that of all the participants: achieving a wider spread of power is a central tenet of democracy.

People must be able to take part in framing public policies at all geographical levels. Practically, this means working one step at a time. Depending on the context, the best thing is to start with the most contentious issues. If need be, classify the problems and address them in turn by holding civic meetings. The advantages of this are not expending participants' energies beyond the time of the conference, leading to a practical outcome which can be implemented quickly, effectively controlled and given a high public profile.

Difficulties to overcome

But participatory democracy has to address a series of ongoing challenges. One of the big principles is that inside everyone is a dormant citizen who needs to be awakened. Another hurdle to

be cleared is that faced by all groups of people: define the problem in correct terms and form without preconceptions.

Other difficulties also exist: participation may be budgeted for as monthly meetings held over a year. That can have several unwanted effects, like participant fatigue, the "professionalization" of some participants, lack of receptiveness to agendas formed outside the areas linked to the participatory budget, etc. So the rules by which this type of process works have to be adapted on an ongoing basis.

But participatory democracy also faces the challenge of legitimacy – this means taking on board that what is at issue is less the legitimacy of the participants, than that of the result obtained. At this juncture, this is a key interface between participatory and representative democracy: representative democracy legitimates, or delegitimates, the "decisions" taken by participatory means.

Conclusion

If forms of participatory democracy are to be implemented, there is an urgent need to make it an obligation at all levels of authority and for all elected politicians to hold at least consultative forums whenever contention arises on any issue. This obligation needs to be coupled at the very least to a system of compulsion and control of the policy action carried out by politicians after getting the outcomes of the consultation. Needless to say that the Institutions, themselves, should be the early focus of at least a multi-participant consultation.

Marion Gret

Political scientist,

research associate CERI/Science Po – University Paris I



The sound of silence: Interview with Gyimesiné Borbála Franyó, Hungarian participant at the 5th and 6th European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty

Q: Tell us a bit about your health right now...

A: I'm seriously hearing-impaired as a result of medical negligence. I was treated in hospital for digestion problems as a small child, but was given drugs for an inner ear infection as well. Other children had the same treatment at that time, because its side-effects on the auditory nerves weren't known. It was only when I reached 10 that my parents realised I couldn't hear their voices from behind. The drug I was given was banned in the 1980s. But as I'm a chatterbox, I don't mind other people's long silences.

Q: Your 'performance' was one of the highlights of this year's Brussels Meeting ...

A: This year's was the second one I've taken part in. My last year's nerves had gone this time, so I felt much more relaxed about addressing the meeting. I used sign language, but it was absolutely not a planned performance. It was 100% off-the-cuff. It just came to me at the last minute

Q: What we are you thinking when you got the audience going?

A: I was really sceptical inside myself :) but I was proud of myself as well, and it was great being listened to. But, taking it from the top - I switched off the mike when I started. There was no point in it because I was signing. I signed, "There are two laws in Hungary about access". Then I stopped to see the effect :) and went on (still signing all the time!), "Can't you understand what I'm saying?!" Now the moderator announced that the interpreters had stopped translating and pointed to his ear-piece. But I signed back to him quite composed,

"I am hard of hearing" and shrugged. I think he was a bit frustrated. You could hear a pin drop in the room. Nobody knew what to do in a situation like that. So I turned the mike back on, 'translated' what I had said before and carried on with my presentation orally. I described the Hungarian situation, the problems of disabled people, and the lack of access. I got a huge round of applause at the end. And you know there is a special sign that deaf people use instead of clapping: they raise their hands and shake them like several "NO"-s. I signed it and several people repeated it to me. That was really cool! Afterwards, several people came to congratulate me, and while we might not speak each others' languages, body language helped us to communicate. The Hungarian interpreters said I have such an impact on people that I should come to Brussels every year to give a voice to disabled people. That gave me a real buzz.



Q: Your active representation is especially impressive given the despair you were in last year in a similar situation. That really is a 'personal journey'. Congratulations!

A: I hope this story helps the readers of this publication to understand, why was it so important for me to deliver my message at the Brussels Meeting to get the European Union to accept sign language as a type of 'minority language'!

Interview: Géza Gosztonyi

SPOTLIGHT ON EAPN HUNGARY (HAPN)

HAPN was founded in April 2004 and joined EAPN just a few months later at the 2004 General Assembly. The network has 79 organisations and 24 individuals as members.

If I had to single out a core principle of the Hungarian Network, it would have to be participation: the Network's participation in wider coalitions and lobbying activities, participation by anti-poverty NGOs in our activities, and last but not least, participation by people experiencing poverty (PEP) in wider society and of course in the Network as a tool.

The Network's organisation was reorganised a year ago to ensure direct participation by PEP. The Coordinating Committee (the Network's executive body) now consists of 10 "professionals" and 10 people experiencing poverty. The latter all have long-standing involvement in the Network's activities: attending the European and Hungarian Meetings of PEP, going on or organising training activities, etc. We have found that real participation and effective cooperation are possible only if both people experiencing poverty and "professionals" are prepared for it.

I know that some EAPN National Networks have wider-ranging experiences in the field. I think the big benefit of networking is the scope for exchanges on different issues. Hopefully, the General Assembly being held in Budapest in November 2007 will give us an opportunity to find out more about each other's experiences and practices in participation.

See you there!

Izabella Marton
EAPN Hungary

The Hungarian National programme to combat child poverty

The programme was prepared in 2006. It was the background paper for the National Strategy "Making Things Better for our Children" 2007-2032, adopted on 31 May 2007 as a Parliamentary resolution.

Why is the programme needed?

In a population of 10 million, Hungary had 2.2 million dependent children under the age of 20 in 2005. Families with children tend to be poorer than childless ones. The poverty rate among families with three or more children was 36%, nearly 3.5 times the average rate. Those worst hit by poverty are children of poorly-educated, unemployed parents living in small villages, from the Roma community, and children with serious disabilities.

In autumn 2005, the Prime Minister initiated the drawing-up of a Programme against child poverty. The proposal summed up here was prepared by a group established within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, led by myself.

The Programme

The programme has multiple inter-connected elements with a long-term (one generation) and short-term (three-year) strands.

It splits the targets into three main groups. One general target is to reduce poverty and social exclusion among children and their families, which includes the separate but complementary goals of reducing the extent and depth of poverty. The goals can be interpreted functionally and linked into the existing system of general government responsibility. They are: to improve parents' employment prospects; to provide better and more equal conditions for children to develop their skills and abilities; to reduce segregation; to improve the level of personal social services and assistance to children and their families; to guarantee children a healthy childhood; and to improve living conditions and the security of having a home. Horizontal goals that cut across all functional areas include: reducing ethnic and regional inequalities and segregation; improving the situation of children with disabilities; improving cooperation between institutions and profes-

sions on various levels; mobilising civil society; and increasing information. The Programme also sets a horizontal priority of improving the infrastructure and conditions of use of the major public systems – schools, healthcare, services – that also serve children.

Building on the success of universalism, but mindful of the big problems created by means-testing and, of course, its limited resources, the Programme proposes two new methods of distribution. Gradual universalism means the phased introduction of a benefit or service that will ultimately become universal. Differentiated universalism means that everyone receives the basic universal provision, but that supplementary benefits, attention, and resources are channelled to hardcore vulnerable groups.

In 2005, the poverty rate among families with three or more children was 36%, nearly 3.5 times the average rate

The key points for the first three years' implementation are: (i) an increase in family benefit for three-or-more-child families and lone parents; (ii) the start-up of early-age development programmes; (iii) improving the situation of the worst-off families.

Two main focuses for the long-term: (i) reducing school segregation by changing the outlook of all actors involved, and improving conditions in failing schools; (ii) making the improvement of community and personal services an absolute priority aimed at bringing about significant change in the acceptance of a more child-centred and tolerant social outlook.

*Prof. Zsuzsa Ferge
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Participation gives people experiencing poverty a voice about their situation and the policies that directly affect them.

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