

# EAPN Proposals on the 'European Platform against Poverty'

The Europe 2020 Strategy includes, as one of its 5 key targets, a target to reduce poverty by 20 million people, to be delivered through a flagship initiative: the 'European Platform against Poverty'.

EAPN key proposals for this flagship are:

- 1) Transform the Social OMC into dynamic EU and National Platforms against Poverty.
- 2) Develop mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of current instruments and move forward on establishing European frameworks to guarantee EU social standards.
- 3) Mobilize EU financial instruments to support the development of social and sustainable service infrastructure, demonstration projects and better participation and governance promoting civil dialogue.
- 4) Ensure that Social Inclusion objectives are mainstreamed across Europe 2020, linked to effective Social Impact assessment.

30 JUNE 2010

## Introduction

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010, the European Commission presented Europe 2020 and its proposals for a new post 2010 Strategy for **smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**. The proposals established 5 priority targets, including a poverty target, reducing by 25% the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion (living on less than 60% of the median income). On June 17, the European Council endorsed the proposals from the EPSCO Council, of a poverty reduction of 20 million people, based on an aggregate of 3 indicators (at-risk of poverty, material deprivation and jobless households). The targets are to be delivered through 7 European Flagship Initiatives. The flagship initiative “European Platform against Poverty” is expected to ensure “**economic, social and territorial cohesion**”, building on the European Year for **combating poverty and social exclusion**, so as to “raise awareness and **recognize the fundamental rights** of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, enabling them to **live in dignity** and to take an **active part in society**”.

**EAPN strongly welcomes the idea of developing a broader Platform against Poverty.** However, in order to be effective, the Platform must be engaged in developing an explicit **EU strategy to deliver on the poverty target**. Whilst the Common Objectives of the Social OMC remain strongly relevant, the new context of Europe 2020 requires the development of a visible EU strategy on poverty and social exclusion, with strategic objectives, measures and timelines. Such a strategy could be developed through a Green Book consultation.

**The Platform against Poverty** would have the responsibility for implementing and monitoring the EU strategy, **building on the strengths of the existing Social OMC**, prioritizing prevention, as well as the alleviation, of poverty. Reducing inequality is also a fundamental pre-requisite for effectively combating poverty and social exclusion, promoting social cohesion and building a better life for all. The EU needs to invest in creating and ensuring access to decent jobs, but also in universal services and quality social protection systems, combined with targeted policies for particular groups, which should tackle discrimination and address specific needs. Only in this way can the EU ensure that all groups get access to quality services, quality jobs and an adequate minimum income, which can provide a solid basis for a dignified life and for more cohesive societies.

**Key to delivery** will be ensuring synergies with the other objectives and targets in Europe 2020, and embedding effective mainstreaming of social inclusion objectives across the whole of the Strategy. The Platform should be the **face of Social Europe**, and have not only the role to ensure the effective monitoring of national anti-poverty strategies, but also to oversee and coordinate the range of different policy areas that impact on social inclusion. Part of its remit should include the scope to move beyond soft instruments, where these have been seen to have limited impact, and develop new and more powerful EU instruments, mobilizing EU funding mechanisms to support actions to reach the target.

None of this, however, will be effective without **strong political will** to deliver results. Above all, this new Platform needs to be **highly visible, and build shared ownership**, by developing a more systematic dialogue with a wider set of key stakeholders, particularly at the regional

and local level. This means involving regional and local authorities, but also people experiencing poverty and the NGOs that support them. EAPN National Networks have long experience of setting up and running broad stakeholder platforms of this type. The Flagship Platform should establish strong links with and support existing EAPN networks, as part of a partnership approach that can deliver concrete actions and results.

### **EU Flagship Platform against Poverty - What needs to be done**

- 1) Transform the Social OMC into dynamic EU and National Platforms against Poverty
- 2) Develop mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of current instruments and move forward on establishing European frameworks to guarantee EU social standards
- 3) Mobilize EU financial instruments to support the development of social and sustainable service infrastructure, demonstration projects and better participation and governance promoting civil dialogue
- 4) Ensure that Social Inclusion objectives are mainstreamed across the Europe 2020 Strategy, linked to effective Social Impact assessment

## 1) Transform the Social OMC into dynamic EU and national Platforms against Poverty promoting partnership, to ensure the development and implementation of an EU strategy to deliver on the poverty targets, through a country and thematic focus

The Social OMC and the delivery on the Europe 2020 Strategy will only work if the process moves beyond mutual learning, gets strong political backing and succeeds in **developing and implementing a new common EU strategy to deliver on the poverty target**, based on the effective engagement of all actors.

At EU level, **strong political will is needed to ensure that an effective strategy is developed, and implementation is energetically and visibly monitored, with transparent follow up.** This must involve wider stakeholder engagement, including EU NGOs, whose members are engaged at a national level. The European Meetings of **People Experiencing Poverty** need to be consolidated as a key instrument in the policy decision-making cycle in the OMC and the Poverty Platform. **National** strategies and monitoring need to be complemented with an **EU thematic approach**, creating **EU thematic clusters**, which can actively engage relevant stakeholders in developing multi-annual strategies to implement **agreed EU priorities**.

Establishing **National Poverty Platforms**, which develop National Poverty and Social Exclusion Strategies through National Action Plans, involving all relevant actors, is also crucial, thus ensuring the link with the regional and local level. The platforms need to draw on bottom-up expertise, collect ideas of good practice and feedback on what works and doesn't work. This means engaging with regional and local government, but also with key grass-roots actors, including people experiencing poverty and the NGOs that work with them, in a **regular structured dialogue**. EAPN National Networks have long experience of establishing such platforms, and in ensuring a link between national realities and the EU level. This experience must be built on and financially supported. Their expertise in developing specific meetings engaging people experiencing poverty, linked to the EU meetings, will also be vital to this process.

The main tasks will be to assess together current realities, identify new trends and challenges, implement common strategies through partnerships, then monitor and evaluate results. This cannot be a one-off encounter, nor merely a bureaucratic reporting procedure, but a **dynamic partnership approach, based on direct, regular, face-to face stakeholder exchange**, where all members contribute to the development, delivery and evaluation of policies.

### At national level

- Each Member State should establish a **National Poverty Platform / Stakeholder Forum, building on and broadening existing NAP and OMC structures**, It should meet a minimum of 4 times a year, developing a partnership approach towards achieving the

objectives of the Social OMC, the EU Platform and the targets, monitored by the agreed OMC indicators.

- **The participants in this platform** should include **all relevant national key actors, including social partners and academic research institutions**, but also **regional and local authorities** and **key grass-roots actors** especially people experiencing poverty and the NGOs that support them, building on the strengths of existing EAPN National Networks.
- **Regional and Local Forums and Plans could provide an essential mechanism for delivery of the objectives of the Platform**, feeding into the national Forum, and allowing meaningful engagement at the grass-root level.
- **The Platform will require relevant tools and a specific budget**, to ensure the effective participation of all key actors, particularly those without means – including NGOs that can support the direct engagement of people experiencing poverty. A specific budget to support the EAPN national networks to strengthen their work in this area will be crucial.
- **The process should be based on a common methodology**, building on EU guidelines, principles and common indicators of what constitutes an effective process and results. Minima criteria and rules for participation and consultation should be enforced in all Member States.
- **Each Member State, together with its national platform, including EAPN networks**, should be charged with the development of a **3-year strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion**, including objectives on prevention, strengthening social protection and ensuring access to an adequate income and universal services.
- **The plan should** establish national targets, measurable against common indicators, and set out an **action plan** for policy measures with key priorities, whilst retaining an integrated, multidimensional approach.
- **An annual review** should be carried out, based on an **agile scoreboard mechanism**, and form the basis of a **yearly debate** on progress on “poverty and social exclusion” with **National Parliaments**. **These debates/reports** should provide input into the **National Reform Programme process**.
- Each national platform should establish links with the **EU thematic clusters/multi-annual strategies**, to promote detailed exchange, involving all relevant stakeholders including NGOs and people experiencing poverty with experience and expertise.
- **Poverty-proofing** needs to be effectively carried out across all policy-making fields, thus ensuring that actions taken by Governments in different policy areas do not undermine, but support the achievement of the poverty reduction target.

### At EU level

- Social Ministers should make a **declaration of political intent** and sign an agreement with the Commission, confirming the targets and strategy to be followed, which has been developed through the National Action Plan process with the National Stakeholder Platforms.

- **DG Employment and Social Affairs and the Social Protection Committee** should be responsible for establishing the Platform against Poverty and providing its driving force.
- **The EU Platform against Poverty should establish a stakeholder forum at EU level**, meeting at least **3 times a year**, to **review progress** on the **EU and national strategies**, targets and common indicators, highlight key challenges and make recommendations.
- **Incentives and sanctions should be considered as instruments to ensure progress** on the agreed targets, these could be linked to release of Structural Funds.
- This **EU Platform Stakeholder Forum** should be charged with reviewing the Joint Report proposal of the Commission and developing the inputs to the relevant Councils and to the National Reform Programme process, including Commission proposals on recommendations.
- The **partners/participants** of the EU Platform / Stakeholder Forum should include: expert representatives of national, regional and local authorities, academics, social partners, European NGOs working with and for people experiencing poverty.
- One of the forum meetings should be a revised annual **Round Table**, which has the explicit objective of **reviewing progress** made on the objectives and targets, involving EU and national stakeholders, and making recommendations to the Council.
- The annual **People Experiencing Poverty Meetings** should be maintained as an autonomous, bottom-up event, supported by the Presidency and the Commission, which “puts people experiencing poverty in charge”, while embedded in the EU policy-making cycle, making recommendations to the Council, following an annual review of progress.
- The Platform should develop **thematic clusters/groupings, which work to develop EU multi-annual strategies**, to facilitate long-term exchange and mutual learning on key EU priorities, and to propose concrete steps for progress. The immediate EU priority areas should be:
  - a) Active Inclusion
  - b) Child Poverty
  - c) Housing exclusion and homelessness
  - d) Migration and ethnic minorities
  - e) Financial Inclusion
  - f) Energy Poverty, and ensuring affordable access to quality services
- The SPC and Commission should draw into these thematic clusters **key stakeholders with specific expertise** – including academics, national and local government actors, NGOs and people directly experiencing poverty, reflecting the reality of the thematic area, as well as national priorities.
- The **peer reviews** could be clearly linked to **each of these key priority areas**, and should have **follow up/broader thematic** reviews which would enable a wider range of actors to engage. A better link should be developed with Employment peer and thematic reviews.
- **Sustainable financing for NGOs** and people experiencing poverty needs to be provided, recognizing the need for long-term investment in civil dialogue for these key groups, providing expertise and promoting grass-roots engagement.

## 2) Moving forward on establishing European frameworks to guarantee EU social standards

The **existing soft instruments** of the Social OMC have not been sufficient to enable progress on the agreed objectives, nor to guarantee the European social model. The EU needs to affirm its commitment to **implementing fundamental rights and ensuring affordable access to rights, resources and services, and reducing inequality**. Whilst good progress has been made in the Environmental, Health and Safety fields, the lack of common frameworks to ensure social as well as economic standards is hampering social progress in the EU, and undermining the credibility of the EU's social goals.

**The Lisbon Treaty lends new weight to the EU social obligations by:**

- enhancing the social values of the EU (Article 2 TEU),
- strengthening the Social Inclusion objectives of the EU (Article 3 TFEU), with new horizontal social clauses (particularly Article 9 TFEU, also Article 8, 10, 11).
- embedding the Charter of Fundamental Rights, as a binding instrument, underpinning all EU policy initiatives and mechanisms.
- providing the basis for coordinated action at EU level on social protection and social inclusion/poverty reduction objectives (Articles 151 and 153).

**The EU Platform against Poverty** should therefore be given the scope to:

- **Assess the effectiveness of current instruments** in delivering agreed EU policy priorities, as well as on the requisites of the Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- **Investigate and develop road maps for common EU frameworks to guarantee basic social standards.** This will necessarily mean the agreement on common definitions, principles and criteria for establishing such standards, rather than fixed norms. An initial priority could be an EU Framework Directive for guaranteeing an adequate minimum income for a dignified life, at least at the relative poverty threshold (60% of median income). This would build on the Council's 92 Recommendation and the 2008 Commission Recommendation to promote active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market, and implement the recommendations of the Independent Experts' synthesis report on Minimum Income.

### 3) Mobilize EU financial instruments to reduce, prevent poverty and ensure opportunities to all

The Commission's Communication on Europe 2020 makes clear that policy initiatives can only move forward if EU funding is targeted on delivering the key objectives, priorities and targets. The EU must continue to ensure a solidarity principle with lagging regions and areas, as well as supporting measures and approaches to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Whilst Structural Funds are given a central role to back the political objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, **all EU financial instruments** need to be mobilized, as part of the review of the Financial Perspectives. Consideration should be given to a **new Framework Programme to support delivery on the poverty target**, with an explicit objective to reduce and prevent poverty and social exclusion.

**A specific new EU financial instrument, Structural Funds and a Renewed PROGRESS programme should deliver on 3 key objectives:**

- **Ensure access to rights to affordable quality services (particularly social services) of general interest, by improving local infrastructures for local communities**, with particular support for lagging regions and areas. A specific area for financial support could be in the development of affordable, energy efficient social housing, affordable quality childcare services, or effective preventative health services (for example, through a New Framework Programme). Promote a better coordination between the financial instruments (notably between ERDF and ESF) and better and easier access to capacity-building for NGOs in the new Regulation in order to facilitate investment in these local infrastructures for local communities and social services.
- **Support delivery on innovative and effective methods to support people into inclusion**, through demonstration projects, particularly focused on developing **integrated active inclusion approaches** ie - providing personalized pathway approaches into training, work or greater social participation. Greater attention and appropriate support needs to be given to developing social economy, particularly WISEs, as a key tool for social and professional inclusion. Regulations will need to ensure that grass-root actors, especially NGOs working directly with people experiencing poverty, are able to effectively access the funds, particularly through improved technical assistance, global grants and pre-financing mechanisms (for example, through Structural Funds). Such innovative demonstration projects should be supported by a transnational dimension of the financial instruments based on partnership with local actors (especially NGOs), and aiming at encouraging the transferability of successful integrated approaches.
- **Awareness-raising and funding support for the active participation of key actors.** Currently, the engagement of actors relies on voluntary resources and commitment. The current awareness-raising programmes have been vital for supporting the engagement of people experiencing poverty and the NGOs that support them in national processes linked to the Social OMC. Successful participation also needs



investment in effective methodologies and in long-term dialogue, involving a preparation process. A number of EAPN National Networks have successfully gained funds for this purpose through the PROGRESS programme. However, if the Platform is to work effectively, expenses need to be covered, but also investment made in the long-term sustainability of NGOs working with people in poverty, as key partners. This means supporting sustainable financing for national and EU NGOs and developing methodologies to facilitate more and better direct participation at national and EU level (for example, through PROGRESS).

#### 4) Ensuring that Social Inclusion objectives are mainstreamed across Europe 2020 and linked to effective Social Impact assessment

The Flagship Platform will need to be given the power to ensure that the social inclusion objective is a central concern and that other policy initiatives within Europe 2020 do not undermine or contradict this, i.e. in the key debates on “bottlenecks to growth”, equivalent weight will need to be given to identifying the **bottlenecks to inclusion**, particularly in relation to **public policy spending priorities in the exit strategies, threatening cuts to public services and benefits**.

- The Platform should review the **social impact assessment** of all key policies relating to Europe 2020, including the National Reform Programmes and the Annual Progress Report.
- Mainstream into Europe 2020 an assessment of the **social impact of the crisis** and the current exit strategies, particularly related to Stability and Growth Pact and cuts in public expenditure.
- Ensure that the results of the appraisal feed into a **yearly EU parliamentary debate**.
- Contribute **recommendations** arising from the assessment as part of the yearly cycle of review, linked to the Europe 2020 and to the December and Spring Council Conclusions.

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This report is supported by the Directorate – General for Employment, Social Affairs and equal Opportunities of the European Commission. Its Funding is provided for under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity PROGRESS (2007 – 2013).

For more information:

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