Comments on EAPN Europe Strategic Plan and Revised Structures
EAPN Ireland, 29 March 2011

On 9 March the EAPN Ireland representative to the EAPN Europe structures met to reflect on participation in the various European structures, as well as the proposed strategic plan and organisation restructure. This meeting was one of a series of coordinating meetings which the various members of the group hold each year.

The analysis of this group was presented, along with the two documents to the EAPN Ireland board on Wednesday 24thMarch, following the board meeting members had the opportunity to comment on a draft response. This document represents the outcomes of this process.

(1) REVIEW OF PARTICPATION IN EAPN EUROPE STRUCTURES

Key outcomes for the Irish network:
- Information which can be distributed to members
- Knowledge of EU developments – information from officials
- Support for intervention in national implementation
- Networking and information sharing across networks – broad range of bilateral contacts
- Development of shared analysis

Key challenges/frustrations
- Full agendas which do not facilitate discussion of key issues
- Agendas domination with technical processes, undermining capacity for self directed discussion and reflection. Agendas are too full.
- Disengagement and lack of energy in discussions from members.
- Dominance of secretariat in discussions.
- Imbalance with regard to NN participation in meetings – inconsistency of attendance, interest etc.
- Lack of engagement from members between meetings (in some cases) / lack of engagement and attendance at meetings.
- Poor facilitation of meetings to ensure maximum participation in discussions.
- Mixed capacities/interests of groups – not maximising potential of knowledge and experience of members.

Key factors
1. Lack of shared analysis on the causes of poverty and inequality.
2. Dominance of agenda by EU processes, rather than priority issues for members.

Key recommendations:
1. Adoption of a stated role and terms of reference for each group, which would include a definition of the role of the secretariat in supporting the work of the group –to translate policy/priorities discussion into technical responses to European processes.
2. Information provision should respond to the needs of the group – not always necessary for full briefing on technical developments.
3. Groups themselves should define and agree agendas in advance of meetings
4. Provide feedback on the impact of the work of the group, particular internally within the networks, and to the Exco.
5. Greater empowerment of networks to act nationally
6. Training and direction for Chairs (Outcomes and Output focused)
7. Ban laptops!

(2) DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN

General Comments:
Overall the vision and mission need focus and clarity of objectives which can be translated into more measureable actions – without which it will not be possible to assess the success or impact of the network.   They do not necessarily need to be as long as they currently are.

Goal 3: People experience in poverty and social exclusion recognise EAPN as their network, is this really what we are about? How would this be interpreted... some PEP or all?

Recommendations:

- Mission bullets 1 and 4 are similar and could be merged.
- Last mission bullet should include a reference to the structural causes of poverty and inequality.
- Should the mission include working with those directly experiencing poverty.
- The key messages should also address a human rights based framework, and in particular the right to a dignified life.
- It is not clear what the difference is between objective 3.1 and objective 3.2
- Values should be clearly named and presented, e.g. first could read "Human Rights: EAPN believes that...". This approach would lead to some streamlining as some of the values are beliefs rather than values.
- Is objective 2.1 the same as 1.1?
- Under goal two, could include an objective on member participation in the structures and work of the network.
- Goal 1: Should EAPN seek to define what it means by a 'social and sustainable model of development'.
- There needs to be an objective on the impact of participation, this is a recurring and serious concern for all those who participate in the work of the Network and other structures, e.g. demonstrate to PEP the added value and impact of their contribution
- Perhaps a concrete objective on participation e.g By x date we will have y% members of network structures made up of people experiencing poverty

(3) DRAFT EAPN STRUCTURES AND WORKING METHODS

Pictures produced by EAPN Ireland as a summary of proposed changes VERY VERY unofficial! For internal purposes only. Included here only to illustrate our reading, acknowledging that misinterpretations are possible!

| **Current** | **Proposed** |
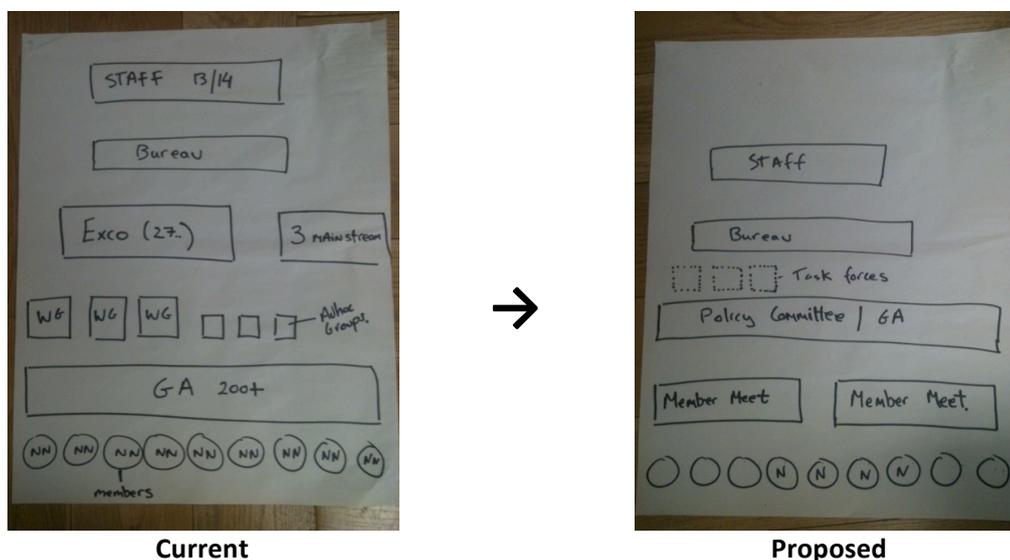
General comments

Concern that the proposed structures, and in particular the role of the policy committee could lead to the concentration of participation in the Network in one individual. This might undermine the broader membership engagement with the Network, and could place an unsustainable burden on the representative appointed to the policy committee, even where this individual is a paid member of staff of the Network. The membership meetings as currently described would not sufficiently address this concern, as it would be likely that the two other participants (excluding policy committee member), would be likely to vary from meeting to meeting, and hence participation in the network's structures would be ad hoc and once off.

Importance of retaining issue based focus of member participation. Do not lose the strength of the current working group structure, which is that it matches member priorities with European policy agendas, and gives them the capacity to engage with these develops at national level. It is important to retain specific policy focuses particularly social inclusion and employment. However there may be other issues which are important to address, and the proposed flexibility in the draft plan is significant in this regard.

The proposed changes extend the membership of the Bureau, and the replacement of the ExCo with a policy committee (also the GA), implies a strengthening of the role of the Bureau. There is a concern that a strengthened bureau could serve to undermine the broader ownership of the network by those national coordinations who are not members of the Bureau. The roles described are broad range and of strategic importance, and perhaps could be more usefully owned by the policy committee (for example overseeing the implementation of the strategic plan).

Proposed changes:

1. Strengthen the role of the proposed **task forces**, ensuring a thematic mandate which reflects the priorities of the Network and the European policy structures (some overlap with the current working groups), while maximising participation and ownership of the national networks. The

task forces present the opportunity to capture the specialised knowledge held within national networks. Taskforces should be established by the policy committee, not the Bureau.

2. Define the role of the **Bureau** in a more strictly legal sense, limiting the number of members.

3. Develop **code of principles** defining the roles of key groups as well as the role of the secretariat in supporting these groups.

4. **Membership meetings.** Increase the involvement as well as continuity of involvement of representatives from the National Networks (need both continuity as well as capacity to involve new members). 4-5- days long present difficulties in terms of supporting participation in the context of voluntary members, who have other commitments, or in the context of care and other social responsibilities. Meetings should not be longer than 3 days, consider one large membership meeting annually, which the taskforces could prepare for with meetings in the lead up to the larger meeting.