

Real Lives, Powering Change



Strategic Plan 2009-2010

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR 2010 EUROPEAN YEAR AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION



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EAPN Ireland

EAPN Ireland is a network of groups and individuals working against poverty and social exclusion. It is the Irish national network of the EU-wide *European Anti Poverty Network*.¹ EAPN Ireland aims to put the fight against poverty and social exclusion at the top of the EU, national and local agenda. 2010 is the 20th anniversary of the founding of EAPN in both Ireland and Europe.

EAPN Ireland's strength is its members. Membership is open to anyone who is committed to ending poverty and social exclusion in Ireland and Europe. The Network's membership is made up of 150 local, regional and national organisations in the community and voluntary sector who share a commitment to realising the potential of the European Union in making a decisive impact on poverty. The work of the Network is supported by associate members – groups and individuals committed to the work of the Network in Ireland and Europe.

The **vision** of EAPN across Europe is a Social Europe free of poverty and social exclusion with access to economic, social and cultural rights for all. EAPN Ireland's vision is the realisation of an inclusive, equal and sustainable Ireland in such a social Europe.

EAPN Ireland's **mission** is to empower people who experience poverty to participate in the decisions that impact their lives. By promoting debate and informed conversations on poverty and social exclusion, the work of EAPN creates a space that allows the voices of people affected by the issues to challenge the fundamental causes of poverty and promote innovative and effective actions against poverty, social exclusion and inequality in Ireland and in Europe.

The **objectives** of EAPN Ireland are to:

1. Provide information to people experiencing poverty and groups that work with them to facilitate engagement with the European Social Agenda and influence public debate on poverty and exclusion.
2. Empower and work with people experiencing poverty and their organisations to collectively influence national and European anti-poverty and social inclusion policies.
3. Build a strong, vibrant and participative network.

Unique position of EAPN Ireland

EAPN Ireland has benefitted from a clear mandate from its members specific to the development of the European Social Agenda. The Network's unique contribution is building and maintaining links between people, organisations, and debates in Ireland and across Europe, and specifically connecting:

- People who experience poverty and social exclusion to the European project.
- The European Social Agenda to the realities of poverty in Ireland.
- The national agenda around poverty and social exclusion to the experiences, successes and challenges faced by other EU member states.
- Members and partners in Ireland and across the European Union.

By positioning itself in a distinct space in the Irish landscape, EAPN in Ireland and Europe has successfully influenced the direction of the European Social Agenda and its implementation in the Irish context, including by:

- Securing the participation of people who experience poverty in national policy processes.
- Helping to shape and inform the annual Social Inclusion Forum.
- Coordinating the Irish delegation to eight successive European meetings of People Experiencing Poverty.
- Ensuring that people experiencing poverty and their organisations in Ireland have the opportunity to contribute to and influence EU policy development in relation to employment, social inclusion, structural funds and services.
- Contributing to an informed debate on the social implications of the Lisbon Treaty, including securing the 'fight against social exclusion' as part of the social clause of the Treaty.
- Providing clear and accessible information and supporting people experiencing poverty and those who work with them to engage with the social implications of other key EU developments including the European Parliament elections and the 2010 EU Year for combating poverty and social exclusion.
- Lobbying for the design and delivery of European funding programmes which would facilitate access by the community and voluntary sector in Ireland.

¹ EAPN (Europe) is working for a Social Europe free of poverty and social exclusion with access to economic, social and cultural rights for all. To achieve this we seek a fair distribution of wealth, accessible quality employment, high levels of social protection, to combat discrimination, and meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. For further information on the European network see: www.eapn.ie.

Context

79 million Europeans live every day at risk of poverty. Despite the boom, in 2007 the figure in Ireland - 16.5% - was higher than the EU average. With rising unemployment and falling incomes this situation is rapidly deteriorating. The social and economic crisis in Ireland and Europe impacts particularly on those most vulnerable in Irish society, including children, lone parents, older people, unemployed, people with disabilities, members of minority groups including Travellers, and those living in disadvantaged communities. The intersection between inequality and social exclusion has never been more apparent; discrimination contributes directly to poverty and exclusion while poverty and exclusion compound the experience of discrimination.

Despite long standing programmes in Ireland and in Europe, poverty remains one of the most pervasive and persistent violations of human rights in our societies. While progress has been made in Ireland, Europe and internationally in combating poverty and exclusion, we have yet to embrace the tools necessary to fundamentally address the causes of poverty. The EU committed in 2000 to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010, while the Irish government has committed to eliminating consistent poverty by 2016. A key tool in reframing a more integrated approach to combating poverty and exclusion is the recommendation on 'Active Inclusion' adopted by the European Commission in October 2008. The Recommendation has three key aspects: adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services. The EU active inclusion strategy parallels the model of the *Developmental Welfare State* (DWS) model adopted by the social partners in the National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) as the framework for social development in Ireland, and represents the first step towards a European legal framework for the fight against poverty and exclusion. However the implementation gap remains a significant challenge, EAPN is committed to realising the potential of such an integrated policy and practice framework in Europe and in Ireland.

Ireland is going through a period of transformational change. A sudden and deep recession, a crisis-ridden financial system and sky-rocketing unemployment have shaken the nation's confidence, and shattered long-held assumptions at the core of our economic and social model. However to date the emerging response and debate on Ireland's economic crisis has failed to address the deep seated poverty issues being exacerbated by the crisis. Erroneous assertions are being made that the most vulnerable in Ireland are in receipt of overly generous welfare payments in a climate of falling prices and allegedly extensive welfare fraud. This rhetoric is contributing to the stereotyping and blaming of those who benefited least from the boom. Irish society must question the dominance of the neoliberal market agenda to the detriment of social cohesion, and vigorously defend the importance of fair income redistribution in the context of the Irish and European social welfare models. More equal societies almost always do better (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009); we must seriously ask ourselves why Ireland has been so averse to a model of development based on greater equality, sustainability, rights and justice.

Half of the world's population lives in absolute poverty, while one in six people on the planet go hungry. As poverty, inequality and injustice are global issues, they are key challenges to the member states of the EU. The EU is the world's largest trader and contributes more in aid than any other donor. At the same time, however, Europe continues to support a model of global development that creates very unequal outcomes and impacts negatively on those living in poverty both within and outside Europe. The impact of the current crisis demonstrates the global interdependence of modern societies. The fight against poverty and social exclusion in Ireland and in Europe cannot be progressed in isolation from the global realities of poverty. EAPN Ireland recognises that the fight against poverty and exclusion is not limited by geographical boundaries and is dependent on addressing the structural causes of inequality. Not only do more equal societies do better but they are better placed to contribute to global equality and sustainability.

In a mature democracy – one that values pluralism, diversity and good governance - everyone has the right to participate in helping to generate solutions to poverty and social exclusion. It is essential that people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their organisations play a central role in all levels of policy making. Over recent years there has been a strong sense across the community sector that hard-won gains in the area of participation have been eroded, with the advocacy functions of anti-poverty, social inclusion and equality organisations being weakened. This has been reinforced by the dismantling of the independent equality, human rights, anti-racism and anti-poverty infrastructure which had developed over the previous decade. Building solidarity and collective action is at the heart of any effective civil society response, and EAPN Ireland is determined to contribute to a stronger civil society movement at national, European and International levels.

2010 is a crucial moment for the EU. As the *EU Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion* it marks the deadline set by the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 for the EU to have made a decisive impact in eradicating poverty in Europe. It presents a vital opportunity to assess how far the EU has succeeded in achieving this goal. The Year is an opportunity for new thinking and new approaches. It is also an opportunity to deepen and broaden cooperation and solidarity with our European partners, and to genuinely contribute to a broader movement based on solidarity with those experiencing poverty across the European Union and beyond its boundaries.

Strategic Plan 2009-2010

This Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan outlines EAPN Ireland's strategy for 2010 – the *EU Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion*. EAPN aims to create a new dynamic for change in Ireland and in Europe, informed by the direct experiences of those living in poverty and aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality in Irish society.

Methodology

Planning the 2010 European Year represented an opportunity for EAPN Ireland to reflect on its activities and work over the last twenty years. The voices of people experiencing poverty are at the centre of this plan, which has emerged with the support of many of those who have worked closely with the Network over recent years. The EAPN Ireland *Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* was developed by our NGO working group on the European Year in collaboration with the broader membership of the Network. It draws on detailed discussions in preparation for the Year, including a National Roundtable held in October 2008, workshops with people experiencing poverty held in March 2009, and two written contributions submitted to the Government's emerging national framework for the Year.² The plan was developed with reference to EAPN (Europe) Strategic Plan 2008-2010 and EAPN proposals on the EU post 2010 strategy.³

Objectives

EAPN Ireland has four key strategic objectives for the 18 month period leading up to and during the 2010 European Year. These are:

1. Progress a new political commitment and understanding of participation in decision-making.
2. Challenge incorrect, destructive or pejorative assumptions and progress responses to income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services (Active Inclusion).
3. Contribute to the public debate on an alternative model of development for a more inclusive, equal and sustainable society.
4. Build the profile and capacity of EAPN Ireland and its members.

These overarching strategic objectives are underpinned by the theme and messages of the Plan.

Theme and messages

The overall theme of the strategic plan is *'Real Lives, Powering Change'*. The theme intends to highlight the significance of the participation and empowerment of those experiencing poverty, through their organisations, to influence public discourse and political analysis, and consequently to shift the balance of power and address the structural causes of poverty and exclusion.

The discourse on poverty and social exclusion in Ireland is a complicated one, frequently characterised by simplistic analysis and stereotyping of those who experience poverty and social exclusion. Recent public debate and responses to the crisis have been marked by a tendency to blame those in poverty for failing to benefit from the boom. The three strategic objectives of EAPN will be advanced only by progressing society's understanding of poverty and its awareness of the realities of poverty.

The key messages of the EAPN Plan aim to support and build an understanding for and a commitment to our four strategic objectives. Through consistent and innovative messaging EAPN Ireland will seek to build the context in which a new political commitment to participation can be realised. By addressing the stereotyping and blaming of those who experience poverty, and highlighting the overall benefits of more equal societies, the Network will work towards building momentum for an understanding and commitment to the need for a national strategy based on adequate income, access to services and labour market supports. In this way it will contribute to the development of a realisable alternative model of development in Ireland and in Europe. In developing its key messages and working towards its four strategic objectives, EAPN will highlight the added value of an approach based on European solidarity and on the potential of the European dimension to contribute to winning the fight against poverty and exclusion.

The messages of EAPN Ireland for the Year are:

1. Direct participation is the key to understanding and addressing the structural causes of poverty and social exclusion.
2. More equal societies do better.
3. An 'EU we can trust'⁴ has a vital contribution to make to shaping a fair and inclusive society.

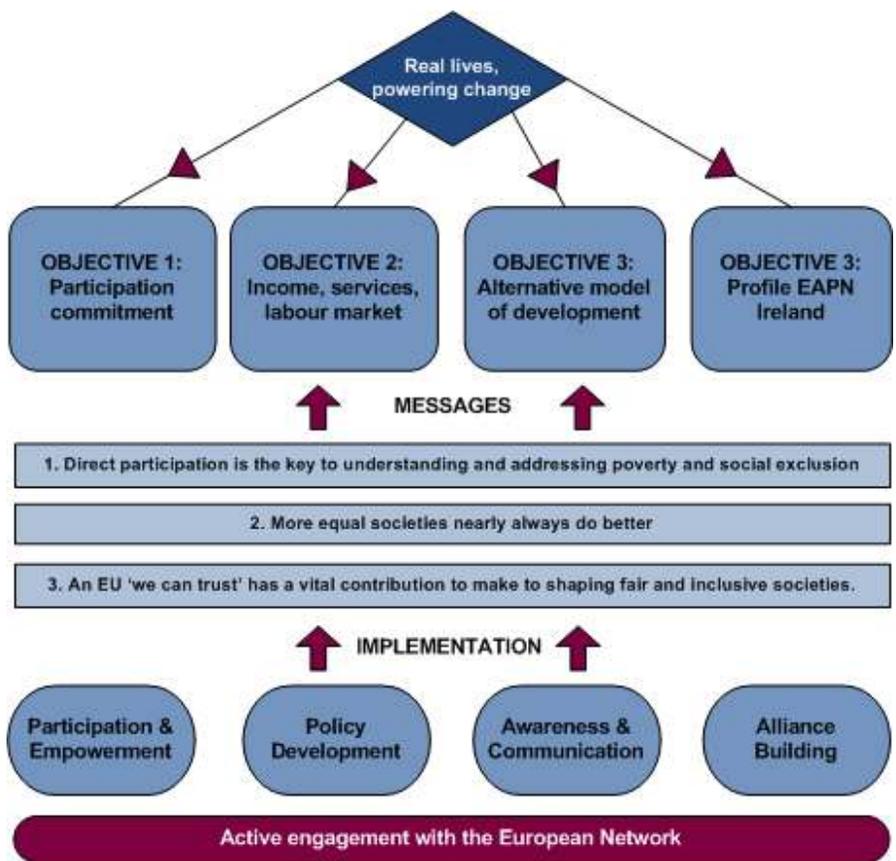
EAPN Ireland aims to deepen existing relationships with our key **stakeholders**, including: people experiencing poverty, the members and board of the Network, like minded alliances and actors, and sister organisations across the European Network. The Year will also be an opportunity to broaden relationships with other key stakeholders including political actors, state bodies and civil servants, and the broader public (with a particular emphasis on building links to the trade union movement and business actors).

² For details on each of these initiative see: www.eapn.ie.

³ For further details see: www.eapn.eu.

⁴ Drawing on the EAPN (Europe) proposal for a post 2010 European economic and social strategy.

Figure 1: Summary of EAPN Ireland Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan.



Implementation Plan

EAPN Ireland realises its mission through active engagement with people who experience poverty and social exclusion and their organisations, connecting with national and European policy process through direct engagement, training and information. EAPN Ireland's analysis and policy development is directly informed by this participative process, and is realised through targeted initiatives including building solidarity and alliances with like-minded organisations.

This plan has been elaborated at a time of a rapidly developing political, economic and social crisis, which brings with it new challenges and opportunities. It aims to set out an ambitious but realistic strategy, which will remain flexible and adaptive, so as to achieve progress in the implementation of its strategic objectives.

In implementing EAPN Ireland's three strategic objectives for the 2010 Year, the Network will work in an integrated manner drawing on four key activity areas: (1) Participation and empowerment; (2) Policy development; (3) Awareness and communication; (4) Strategic alliance building

Participation and empowerment

EAPN Ireland's commitment to the direct participation of people who experience poverty and social exclusion informs all aspect of the Network's work at national and European levels. The 2010 Year represents an opportunity to embed participative and innovative strategies in the internal work of the Network, and to promote a renewed political commitment to effective participation in policy making process.

EAPN Ireland will realise its internal and external participation objectives through:

- Direct engagement with people experiencing poverty in focus groups on issues of concern to them (25 focus group led by partners), focusing on income, services and labour market.
- Training sessions with individuals who are interested in becoming more engaged in policy processes in the context of the 2010 Year (three thematic training sessions).
- Development of a 'train the trainers' programme to secure sustainable strategies for enhancing engagement with local, national and European policy agendas (manual and training).
- Development and implementation of a stories campaign, with the real participation of those directly impacted by the issues represented.
- Preparation and participation of the Irish delegation in the 9th European meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, building on the outcomes of the 8th meeting.
- Building the membership of the Network and empowering existing (and new) members to become involved in activities related to the European Year.
- Organising regional meetings between people experiencing poverty and MEPs (building on pre elections contacts).

The implementation of these activities will be framed by the development of an EAPN Ireland statement and strategy on participation. The statement will set out the EAPN Ireland commitment to participation and will outline key principles including equality, diversity, innovation, development, solidarity and respect.

Policy development

Drawing on the direct engagement with and the stories generated by people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the organisations that work with them, EAPN Ireland will inform its political objectives for the Year by developing substantive and informed analysis, securing the implementation of the two specific political objectives for the Year – a renewed political commitment to participation, and progressing the active inclusion agenda (income, services, and labour market). Specific actions will include:

- Three 'Burning Issues Papers' on income, services and labour market activation (led by partners).
- A study on the impact of the European Social Agenda in Ireland.
- Analysis of Ireland's social welfare provisions in a comparative European context.
- Research on rural income targets (led by partner) and the development of income targets.
- Research on effective integrated service delivery at local level (led by project partner Cork City Council).
- Thematic regional roundtables (nine led by partner) on income, services and labour market activation
- National roundtables (three led by partners) on income, services and labour market activation
- Effective consultation initiative and report, including the development of a proposal for a participation commitment.
- European conference launching the EAPN political strategy for the Year (February 2010), as part of broader strategies to realise EAPN Europe's proposals on a new post 2010 EU strategy.
- Implementation of the European campaign on adequate minimum income in Ireland.

Awareness and communication

The success of EAPN Ireland's political objectives will in large part depend in the Network's capacity to generate support for our agenda amongst broader stakeholders. The Year represents an opportunity to build awareness and communications work framed in the real experience of those living in poverty, with the specific aim of achieving the two political objectives on participation and active inclusion. All communication activities will be informed by the three key messages outlined above. Specific actions will include:

- Development of a media initiative on the 2010 Year, with emphasis on representing stories of those experience poverty (factsheet and training) and opening up critical debate.
- Participation and development of activities relating to the 17 October, UN Day against Poverty.
- Development and implementation of a stories campaign, with the real participation of those directly impact by the issues represented.
- 6-8 local authority events building on the stories campaign.
- Specific media initiatives to dissemination actions, including the transnational conference and the stories campaign.
- Ongoing strategies to respond to emerging debates and make targeted contributions to media debate in the context of the three key messages.
- EAPN Newsletter on 2010 European Year.
- Development of new website.
- Anniversary publication and celebration (20-20 vision).

The implementation of these activities will be framed with the development of an EAPN Ireland communications strategy. The communications strategy will place at its heart the participation of people experiencing poverty, and EAPN Ireland commitment to empowering individuals to work in solidarity with other in a manner that is respectful and of broader benefit to the individual, their communities and wider society.

Alliance building

As a membership organisation EAPN Ireland has emphasised the development of strategic alliances with key stakeholders to promote its policy agenda. Like minded organisation within and outside of the community and voluntary sector are critical to the ongoing success of the Network. At a time of crisis never before have joint actions and solidarity been more important. Implementing this strategic plan EAPN Ireland will seek to strengthen existing alliances and build new Networks including:

- The Community Platform.
- The Equality and Rights Alliance.
- Is Feidir Linn.
- The Poor Can't Pay Campaign.
- ADT fourth World and the 17 October Committee.
- Development Organisations (Dochas).
- Political actors (opposition political and MEPs).
- Trade Unions (SIPTU day of protest September 2009).
- Business groups (including seeking partnerships in the context of 2010 Year activities).
- European led organisations such as the European Movement and the IIEA.
- The European Institutions in Ireland.

EAPN Ireland has been an active participant of the European Network since its inception, this strategic plan is premised on the ongoing engagement with the European Network and the development of bilateral relationships with sister networks in other EU member states. EAPN Ireland will engage actively in all the working structures, advocacy initiatives, and campaigns of the European Network, and through its representative in the Executive Committee in the overall governance of the Network.

Profile and capacity of EAPN Ireland

A key objective of this strategic plan is to use the opportunity of the European Year to build the profile and capacity of EAPN Ireland and its members. In an increasingly uncertain political and economic environment it is imperative that the Network deepen its position as a key partner for a broad range of stakeholder, and develop political and institutional support for its core activities. Specific action will include:

- Articulation of the unique position and work of EAPN Ireland through a short leaflet.
- Development of a new web based presence and 'look' for the Network.
- Standardisation and modernisation of EAPN Ireland outputs.
- Development of supportive relationships with critical stakeholders.
- Strengthening of the governance and membership structures of the Network.
- Development of a strategic plan for 2011 – 2014 and linked fundraising strategy.

Fundraising and resourcing

Much of the financial resources necessary to realise the implementation of this plan have already been secured by the Network. EAPN Ireland is core funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and has successfully secured project funding from the European Commission to undertake many of the planned actions. Additional funding supports will be sought by EAPN Ireland to realise all of the activities envisaged in this plan.

Evaluation and impact assessment

EAPN Ireland, under the auspices of its European Commission funded project, has engaged an external evaluator to assist us in assessing the impact and effectiveness of specific actions envisaged in this strategic plan. EAPN Ireland will develop an evaluation framework in order to ensure effective data collection strategies relating to all planned initiatives. In generating an assessment of the Network's impact, periodic reflections will be benchmarked against output indicators in order to generate a qualitative assessment of overall success in realising the three strategic objectives, and in communication the three key messages. By generating a substantive analysis of impact in the context of the implementation of this plan, the evaluation framework will contribute to ongoing reflections on the direction of the Network.