



EAPN BRIEFING

**EAPN CAMPAIGN
FOR ADEQUATE MINIMUM INCOME
Background information**

November 2007

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1. WHY AN EAPN CAMPAIGN ON MINIMUM INCOME NOW?

Minimum Income can be defined as a non contributory income guarantee that enables people who cannot fend for themselves, to receive a minimum amount of monetary income. 24 out of 27 Member States have minimum income schemes in place at this present time, but there are serious flaws with the accessibility and the adequacy of these schemes.

Poverty is not only about money (see EAPN poverty explainer, 2007 on www.eapn.com), but having sufficient money to live on is an essential pre-requisite for a decent life. Minimum Income schemes are also the corner stone of social protection. In a framework of lack of progress in the fight against poverty there are 3 main reasons why EAPN wants to campaign now on Minimum Income:

- Minimum Income schemes are not accessible to all today, and the levels are too low to allow for a decent standard of living.
- Minimum Income schemes are increasingly associated with compulsion and with a negative image of the poor, which undermines a key positive element of the European social model.
- EU level willingness to go further on the issue of minimum income is hindered by a lack of political commitment, but there is a window of opportunity to make progress with the ongoing 'Active Inclusion' process.

1.1. Minimum Income schemes are not accessible to all today and the levels are too low to allow for a decent standard of living:

Minimum income schemes do not exist in all EU countries Italy, Greece and Hungary do not have such schemes organized at national level.

Accessibility for all is not guaranteed in the places that they do exist. Some groups are not entitled to Minimum Income due to their age, employment situation, or status as migrants

Complexities of the systems prevent people from taking up their rights: the support schemes that do exist are often a complex, entangled mesh, which many find very difficult to traverse which acts as a barrier to claiming what is rightfully theirs.

Minimum Income schemes are not set at a level adequate enough to lift people out of poverty. They do not take into account the rise in the cost of living nor the increasing price of services that people rely on, such as housing or energy. They fail to consider the reality of heavy financial deficit that people are often forced to live with.

1.2. Increased conditionality and compulsion are attached to the Minimum Income schemes with the aim to provide 'incentives' for people to work

The difficulties of living on an inadequate income are growing.

More and more conditions are being placed on receiving the minimum income /social welfare in an effort to force integration into the labour market. Benefits are reduced after a certain period, as an 'incentive' to become more active in finding employment. This results in making in some cases social benefits conditional on the take up of low quality jobs which do not correspond to personal competencies and

needs. These sanctions are unfairly leaving people in situations where they receive no income at all to live on.

Contrary to the populist beliefs which informs this compulsion approach, people do want to find work and be useful in their society but they are faced with many obstacles and barriers (such as lack of quality jobs, access to education and training etc, lack of support services like child and other care services) that prevent them from doing so.

1.3. There is a lack of public and political recognition of the right to access minimum resources, due to negative images and false stereotypes

There is a huge void in political and public recognition of this situation linked to the stigmatization of receiving benefits and the often false impressions that exist of people who survive on this minimum income. Instead of being seen as essential for a decent society and a safeguard for all, available when necessary, it is seen as a hand out given to lazy people who have no intentions of finding work.

The access to minimum income is a social right and the pre-requisite for a dignified life. In a decent society, no individual – man, woman or child should be forced to live below this level. The provision of minimum income in our society brings many positive things, not only does it provide a safeguard to those in precarious situations who are not able to work but provides people with the necessary security so that they can actively seek work, rather than having merely to struggle to survive. Without the provision of minimum income, poverty would be a much higher cost to society in terms of healthcare, education, public costs etc.

2. THE ALTERNATIVE APPROACH EAPN IS PROMOTING.

Based on the expertise of its members and the vision shared within the Network EAPN wants to promote a different approach:

- Access to decent and adequate income should be considered as a **basic right** for all, as part of the right for all to have a dignified life.
- Minimum Income schemes should be recognized as a key element in Social Protection systems, necessary to increase **social cohesion** and fight against poverty, as well as to build a cohesive society for future generations.
- **Not** providing adequate minimum income schemes has huge costs in terms of social cohesion, as it leads to greater demands on social protection systems and greater societal divisions,. It is important to highlight this fact with the aim of countering negative ideas associated with minimum income – such as it leading to benefits dependency, promoting passive behaviour or as a non productive heavy burden for public finances.
- An **integrated approach** should ensure that access to Adequate **Minimum Income**, access to decent jobs and access to **quality services** are developed and mutually reinforcing, whilst ensuring that adequate financial and other support is provided for people for whose work is not a option, due to family responsibilities, age, disability etc.
- The assumption that employment is automatically the route out of poverty and social exclusion should be challenged: A high proportion of the most disadvantaged people often only access low-paid and precarious work and more than 7% of the working population suffer in **work poverty**. Inadequate minimum income schemes act as an incentive for poverty level wages.
- Not everybody is able to work, nor is paid work always the best first step to inclusion. A positive strategy would support individual pathways, helping people to gain confidence and competences which would lead to more autonomy as part of an integrated, multidimensional approach.

- The increasing conditionality that is being imposed on access to **minimum income** schemes in order to force integration into the labour market should be challenged. This is neither effective nor socially just, particularly when dealing with vulnerable people who are furthest from the labour market, and their children.
- If the EU is to be social, it must be seen as contributing to social progress by enabling access for all to minimum income adequate for a dignified life, when needed.

3. MINIMUM INCOME IN THE EU PROCESSES: SOME POSSIBLE PROGRESS THROUGH THE ACTIVE INCLUSION DISCUSSION?

3.1. The 1992 recommendation: a momentum, not enough followed up.

The 24 June 1992, the European Council came to a momentous unanimous agreement: to lay down common criteria on “sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection system” ([Recommendation 92/441/EEC](#)).

Members States were asked to

- Recognize the basic right of a person to sufficient resources and social assistance to live in a manner compatible with human dignity as part of a comprehensive and consistent drive to combat social exclusion
- To give access to that right without time limit within the framework of social protection systems.
- To fix the amount of resources considered sufficient to cover essential needs with regards to respect for human dignity
- To implement the measures laid down in the Recommendation progressively from now on.

How this recommendation has been implemented?

Since 1992, most Member States have introduced or developed Minimum Income system, apart from notable exceptions (Hungary, Greece, and more recently Italy). But there are significant differences in the working of these schemes across the EU and their impact on vulnerable people.

In 1999 the Commission in its implementation report on the Recommendation, noted that the number of minimum income recipients had increased since the 1980's, with single parent families (90% women) and single men being the main beneficiaries.

In 2002 the first joint report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion showed progress made with 13 out of 15 Member States introducing a minimum income scheme. In 2004 the Second Report raised new concerns about the need to ensure that minimum income schemes were not a disincentive to employment. However, misgivings were highlighted about the relative adequacy of such schemes and how this was measured

3.2. The current consultation on action at EU level to promote the ‘active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market’.

■ A new context after the revision of the Lisbon strategy in 2005

The Lisbon Strategy, launched 2000 and initially focusing in a balanced way on three pillars (Economic policies, Employment policies and Social policies) has been reviewed in 2005 and refocused on growth and jobs first. This new approach insisted on impact of demographic change and the need to increase the

proportion of people active to ensure the sustainability of the pension system. The approach developed was that public policies should first support growth and jobs, and then social inclusion would derive automatically. A strong focus has been put on the so called 'disincentives affects' of social protection, and the need to 'make work pay' so that people are encouraged to take on work.

In this context a new initiative to move forward on the Implementation of the 1992 Directive was announced, in February 2005 in the EU Social Agenda.

■ **ACTIVE INCLUSION** - In February 2006 the Commission published its promised **Consultation on Minimum Income, but with a dramatic change in focus** – emphasising the role of growth and employment, and developing a new approach called '**active inclusion**'. ([European Commission consultation on the promotion of the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market](#), COM 2006 544 final).

Active inclusion is defined as a comprehensive strategy containing 3 main elements: **1)** A link to the labour market through job opportunities or vocational training **2)** Income support at a level sufficient enough for a dignified life **3)** Better access to services, to help labour market integration - child care services, healthcare, counselling, lifelong learning, ICT, flexible work arrangements...

EAPN welcomes this holistic approach. However, our worry is that the issue of minimum income schemes are addressed primarily in terms of the role they could play in encouraging people into work, rather than as a defence of an adequate minimum income as a basic social right. The stated **goals** of the Communication are firmly focussed on the Lisbon strategy:

- To review the progress to fostering access to labour market access (i.e. Active Labour Market measures).
- To launch a public consultation on possible guidelines at EU level for promoting active inclusion for those furthest from the labour market.

The aim of this consultation was:

- "to review the progress made (...) towards the aim of fostering labour market access for those who are excluded"
- "to launch a public consultation on possible guidelines for action at EU level, with a view to promoting active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market."

Content of this communication

- There is recognition of the **role of social protection systems in reducing the risk of poverty**, through providing a basic safety net. Its role in fighting the continuing persistence of risk of poverty for hard-core groups particularly: unemployed people, inactive, single parents, disabled and the chronically ill. It also recognises the multidimensionality of the problem – the link with homelessness, drug addiction, the importance of access to services.

- Recognition is made of the fact that **cost-cutting on Minimum Income schemes** can result in increased demand on other social programmes eg family allowances, as well as social and economic costs.

- It is recognised that **good activation should not just be about employment** but should contribute to reducing social isolation, developing self esteem etc. It points out that **not enough attention has been paid to ensuring adequate access to social services** as a pre-condition for availability for work.

- However, little or no attention was given to reasons why people are unable to take up work eg; inadequate minimum wages, limited job opportunities, discrimination, or the impact of family responsibilities, age, disability or bad health, etc....

A [synthesis report of the responses by the Commission services](#) noted that the Commission received 73 contributions (14 from National Governments), and that "there is a shared view that more needs to be done at the EU level".

■ On 17 October 2007 the EU Commission initiated the second phase of the consultation with a communication entitled ["taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market." COM 2007 620\(final\)](#). This consultation is open till end February 2008.

This communication recognizes that more needs to be done to implement the 1992 recommendation. It envisages the following EU actions:

1) Deepening of the Open Method of Coordination through the adoption of common principles and their subsequent systematic monitoring and evaluation. A new **Recommendation** could promote the identification and adoption of the common principles and detail the elements of the active inclusion strategy, in relation to its three elements: income support sufficient to avoid social exclusion (note that the elements of the 1992 are considered as still fully relevant), link to the labour market, and better access to quality services.

2) A supporting EU framework, including:

- the use of the provisions of the new European Social Fund regulation to promote active inclusion measures;
- the support within the PROGRESS EU programme of the establishment of a Network of Local Observatories

■ **Specificities of the consultation process: we must clearly stand up as stakeholders.**

This consultation follows the process provided for under Article 138(2) of the Treaty, which call for the Commission to consult management and labour force before submitting proposals in the policy field. Social partners are first targeted by this consultation, even if, given the subject, the consultation has been widened to public authorities at all level and civil society organisations.

It is important that it remains widely acknowledged that on this matter which is key for social inclusion, civil dialogue must go together with social dialogue, and it is important that we clearly and visibly express ourselves inside and outside of the formal consultation process.

This current consultation is key and concerns the main areas and EU process that are of interest for EAPN. It opens a window of opportunity to move forward on the effective implementation of the 1992 recommendation. We welcome the Commission willingness to make progress on these issues. At the same time we will identify the contradictions and hidden traps that we see in this approach. It will be important that this initiative is not replacing the broader detailed objectives of the OMC. And we will insist that this process effectively ensure that current policies and measures are monitored and evaluated through active stakeholders process in the OMC, and is a first step in moving towards social standards in the EU. It will be also key that Member States continue to highlight social inclusion as a broader objective and the priority to ensure adequate social protection, rather than a focus on work as the only route out of poverty and social exclusion.

4. EAPN PAST AND CURRENT ACTIVITIES ON MINIMUM INCOME: DEBATING, LOBBYING, CAMPAIGNING!

EAPN is currently engaged in:

- Drafting a detailed response to the Communication in due time for the February 2008 dead line, and will be actively lobbying to promote its views both at EU and National level.
- Implementing a campaign on Adequate Minimum Income to be launched in December 2007 to insist on the need to ensure that everyone has access to a dignified life through access to Adequate Minimum Income when needed.

■ December 07- February 2008: First stage of EAPN Minimum Income campaign!

Member States will retain the responsibility for defining levels of income support and for establishing a mix between social assistance and services provision and making work pay. However we can now use this EU level initiative on Active Inclusion as a base to encourage Member States to respond to the consultation favourably. We can use this period to **raise awareness on the realities** of life when someone is dependant on minimum income, to **mobilizing public and government opinion in favour of adequate minimum income schemes** and to highlight the dangers associated to pushing people into a job at any price, without regard to their personal circumstances... We can also use it to **place emphasis on** the other important factors that the communication has included and which are necessary to enable the full social participation of people experiencing poverty such as **the creation of good quality, secure and well paying jobs** that provide life long learning and support **and the provision of good social services and assistance**. It is also a chance to **reinforce the need to have social rights as an issue in it's own right** and not only as a contributing factor to the overall objectives of the EU to have more growth and jobs. And finally we can use it to **highlight the need for the EU to implement adequate minimum income schemes to ensure that society delivers a life of quality, built on social rights** where everyone is able to take up their responsibilities and participate fully in society.

Campaign information and material (posters and leaflet, campaign guide, open letter to EU governments, comparative table, "Myth and Realities" article...) are available on EAPN website www.eapn.org.

This action is planned in the continuity of a variety of EAPN discussion and activities over the past years, the issue of Minimum Income having been an underlying theme in the Employment and Social Inclusion working groups.

■ November 2007

In their **review of the implementation of the Strategic reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2006-2008)** EAPN highlighted their concern that active inclusion should not replace the agreed objectives and priorities established previously by the OMC to eradicate poverty and promote social inclusion, and make recommendations for an effective active inclusion strategy, namely:

- Active inclusion should not be seen as the only strategy contributing to the eradication of poverty and social inclusion
- Approaches to active inclusion should really integrate its 3 dimensions

- Positive activation should support people on the road to decent jobs
- The EU should move forward to ensure social standards for all
- The importance of a real political ambition and active governance in the Open Method of Coordination to implement this vital agenda (see EAPN report [Light year, hard work, October 2007](#))

■ **2005–2007 EAPN participated in a transitional European project**, which focused among other issues, on Minimum Income Standards.

This project, which gathered a variety of partners from 9 countries, made the following conclusions.

“The Open Method of Coordination in the field of Social Inclusion is valuable, but is not, in its present form, strong enough to achieve the agreed Council target *“to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010”*. **Additional approaches** are needed to make this happen.

Social standards can play an important role in the fight against poverty in most regions and states participating in the project, and there is potential added value to be gained from an EU-level initiative to ensure common efforts to protect high level social standards accessible to all. Agreeing a common approach to social standards at EU level is best seen as **a process of dialogue involving the European Union, Member States, people experiencing poverty, social researchers and the general public to agree on ‘sets’ of essential goods and services** needed in each Member State for a dignified life there, and complementary programmes and actions at all the appropriate levels to ensure that everyone has access to such ‘sets’.

This approach to setting and achieving common social standards across the EU **should be further investigated and ‘piloted’ and assessed** for its potential to provide an approach that could contribute to the aim of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty.

Many partners felt that an **EU Directive** to require Member States to guarantee the resources needed for human dignity could also provide useful added value and should be investigated further.

Strengthening the application of **international instruments such as the Council of Europe’s European Social Charter (revised version, 1996), EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** should play an important role in securing high level social standards accessible to all in the European Union”.

(see more information on the project on [EAPN Ireland website](#).)

■ **February 2007** - EAPN expressed its worries on the confusing mix up of the terms minimum income and minimum resources at the EPSCO Council which led to the questioning of the political will to deliver on this issue in a [press release](#).

■ **April 2006** EAPN issued [its response to the European Commission’s first communication](#) on active inclusion and contributed to the Social Platform’s response.

■ **March 2006** – EAPN participated in the Parliamentary Fourth World Inter-group on minimum income and supported the development of the inter-groups response to the consultation.

■ **In September 2005** EAPN issued a [special ‘Network News’](#) on this theme, and we participated in a Social Platform conference on Fundamental Rights with a focus on this issue.

ANNEXES

1- EAPN core demands

2- Glossary

EAPN CORE DEMANDS ON MINIMUM INCOME: WHAT DO WE WANT

On the concept

1. It should not be accepted that, in the EU, some people are being left without sufficient income for a dignified life.
2. Access to decent and adequate income should be considered as a **basic right** for all, as part of the right for all to have a dignified life.
3. Minimum Income schemes should be recognized as a key element in the Social Protection systems, necessary to increase **social cohesion** and fight against poverty, as well as to build a cohesive society for next generations.
4. Such a positive notion should counter negative **representations** associated with Minimum Income schemes (as leading to benefits dependency, promoting passive behavior, or as a non productive heavy burden for public finances...). On the contrary it has to be highlighted that non providing Minimum Income can have a huge cost in terms of social cohesion.
5. EAPN insists that the clear notion of **Minimum Income** is used and promoted as a common EU reference, and not the vague notion of resources likely to open the way to a variety of implementation including in kind support, or confusion with minimum wage.
6. An **integrated approach** should insure that access to **Minimum Income**, access to the **Labour Market** and access to **quality services** are developed and mutually reinforcing, as part of a positive Active Inclusion approach.
7. Minimum Income schemes should be part of **integrated social, employment and economic policies**. Minimum income, combined with more and better quality jobs, are essential to eradicate poverty and promote social inclusion.

On its implementation

8. Minimum Income schemes should be developed in **every Member States** (including Italy, Hungary and Greece where no comprehensive minimum income system exists).
9. Minimum Income schemes should be **effective** in lifting people out of poverty. Their adequacy should be checked with the participation of people concerned (see the 'Basket of Goods' process proposed in the transnational exchange project on Social Standards <http://www.eapn.ie/standards/>).
10. The adequacy of Minimum Income schemes should be assessed with regard to their concrete purchasing power, notably taking into account accessibility of services, and the issue of debt.
11. Minimum Income schemes should be easily **accessible to all**. Member States should be encouraged to **rationalise the complex, entangled mesh** of income support schemes whether minimum income or contributory replacement income schemes or other benefits, in order to address the lack of take up.
12. **The specific barriers and obstacles that different target groups face in accessing Minimum Income should be recognized and identified**, such as these faced by single parents or people suffering from long-term sickness, as well as those that arise from gender, age, ethnicity or migrant status, disability, religious or other beliefs, sexual orientation or other factors.
13. Minimum income schemes should be recognized and promoted as providing an **essential secure income base**, necessary element in itself of 'good activation' policies, and not be part of activation policies using compulsion, and the importance of **integrated, personalized, pathway strategies** that support people into work or "along the road" to inclusion should be emphasized.

14. The right to **quality, affordable services** as an essential counterpart to ensuring a decent income for all should be recognized and **promoting integrated services** that respond to the **multidimensionality** of poverty should be promoted
15. To promote good governance and participation by **directly involving people in poverty** in the development, management and evaluation of Minimum Income schemes, together with **NGOs** that support them and other key stakeholders.

On the role of the EU with regard to the needs of People Experiencing Poverty

16. We demand that Minimum Income schemes are considered as the concrete emblematic implementation of the European Social Model that ordinary people in Europe are expecting, and that European Institutions take major steps to ensure the effective implementation in all Member States in the coming months.
17. The EU should build on the **1992 Council recommendation**, and develop and implement **standards** on minimum income, using a variety of instruments in the Social Inclusion area:
 - the **Open Method of Coordination on Social Inclusion and Social Protection** should focus and deliver on Minimum Income, and establish and update adequate levels, and then to monitor and evaluate the impact.
 - the promotion of **peer review and mutual learning** on good practice examples of minimum income and a stronger Mutual should be promoted;
 - a Directive on the basis of article **Article 137 (1) h of the Treaty should be considered.**
18. Furthermore, the objective of developing and guaranteeing adequate Minimum Income based on rights should be mainstreamed in the Community Employment and Economic policies, including Active Labour Market Policies/Active Inclusion, the Lisbon agenda, Internal market policies with regards to their impact on services, and comprehensive transversal policy proposal developed.
In its approach the European Union should promote participative approaches to the review, the shaping and the implementation of Minimum Income schemes.

GLOSSARY

Social security or welfare benefits is a name for the incomes provided by public authorities on various grounds: for sickness and disabilities, youth or old age, family responsibilities, unemployment and so on. Some of these forms of income maintenance are also called **replacement benefits** since they replace earnings from employment when people are unemployed.

Benefits are organized on the base of social insurance (entitlement by contributions) or social assistance (entitlement on the basis of low income).

Minimum Income provisions are social assistance schemes of last resort and are therefore a lifeline for the people in greatest poverty in Europe. Most of EU Member States have some kind of minimum income scheme, incorporating different strands of social welfare and assistance, though the accessibility and adequacy of the schemes vary enormously. Most of them do not pay benefits sufficient to overcome poverty, but only alleviate it to some extent.

Minimum Incomes of the social assistance kind must be distinguished from **minimum wage schemes** which offer employees a floor level of salary fixed by law.

In 1992 the European Council recommended Member States to recognize people's basic right to "sufficient resources and social assistance **to live in manner compatible with human dignity**".

Minimum Income is distinct from **basic income** which is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.

EAPN believes that it is important to use the widely understood idea of Minimum Income instead of the confusing concept of '**minimum resources**' which may be used to refer to the provision of services in kind. However it is crucial that Minimum Income schemes are complemented with good quality accessible services and, for those people able to return to the labour market, positive action to support them back into employment.

The levels of Minimum Income should be fixed in relation to the national standards of adequacy and decency. Adequate Minimum Incomes should be at the heart of high level Social Standards so that the European Union is better equipped to become a cohesive society. This is why we promote the notion of **Adequate Minimum Income** for a dignified life.

Poverty and inequality: for an introduction to the poverty debate, explanations on how poverty is understood and measured currently in the EU, key sources of information and data see [EAPN Poverty explainer](#), November 2007.

.EU bodies, processes and key documents

European Council: meeting of the European Commission and heads of Member States four times a year to agree overall EU policy and to review progress. It is the highest level policy making body in the EU, and often referred to as 'summits'. See [Council website](#).

Lisbon Strategy: Action and development plan for the European Union – *"to make Europe, by 2010, the most competitive and most dynamic knowledge based economy in the world"* – See [Europa webpage on Growth and Jobs](#).

Open Method of Coordination for Social Inclusion and Social Protection–the EU Social Inclusion Strategy, made of:

1. Common objectives agreed at EU level
2. Common indicators
3. National Reports on strategies for social protection and social inclusion
4. national action plans in each country to implement these objectives
5. A **Joint Report on Social Inclusion** which analyses the plans from the member states by theme and by country
6. A Community action programme to promote policy cooperation and transnational exchange of learning and good practicesystem of 'peer review', involving scrutiny of the national plans and exchange of examples of good practice.

See [social inclusion Europa's webpage](#).

Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion are available on [Europa's webpage](#)

Active Inclusion – key documents regarding this process can be found on [Europa's webpage on active inclusion](#).

See also the [Council Recommendations 92/441/CEE of 24 June 1992 on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems](#).