

# Network news



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

N°124 | OCTOBER-DECEMBER | 2007

Editorial

## Structural Funds: an instrument for social change

**S**tructural Funds can offer considerable opportunities for NGOs to combat poverty and social exclusion.

The EC Regulations for the financial perspective 2007-2013 are drafted in such a way as to facilitate an involvement of NGOs to deliver relevant programmes to excluded groups and communities.

EAPN augurs that the next programming period will recognize NGOs as full social partners participating in activities that promote poverty at national, regional and local levels. We must remember that 78 million people are living in poverty throughout the EU. Structural Funds have made a difference and should continue doing so.

There are a wide range of measures to be looking at through ESF and ERDF. EAPN will promote co-operation between the various stakeholders to make sure that NGOs working with and for disadvantaged groups have access to Structural funds with measures in place to combat poverty and social exclusion.

The new programming period offers us all numerous challenges one of which is the loss of EQUAL. We need to incorporate lessons learnt through EQUAL to enhance our activities towards the disadvantaged groups.

NGOs with their rich mix of skills, knowledge and experience can look forward to a new range of opportunities under the new regulations.

The Structural Funds were never about the money. They were always about using the funds as an instrument for social change. They provide an opportunity for new models of delivery to be developed, new priorities, new methods, an opening for civil society.

*Claudia Taylor East – EAPN Malta  
Chair of the EAPN Task Force on Structural Funds*

## INCLUSION IN STRUCTURAL FUNDS 2007-2013

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## Structural Funds 2007-2013: Making a difference to tackle exclusion?

Often presented as the EU's main success story and solidarity instrument, structural funds have been at the heart of the EU's 50th anniversary in 2007. Yet as the 2007-2013 programming period is entering its operational phase, time has come to go beyond self-celebration, learn lessons from the past and make structural funds a better tool against exclusion.

### A new framework for the "EU success story"

For the period 2007-2013, cohesion policy will benefit from 35.7% of the total EU budget (347.4 billion euros), and its framework has undergone major reforms to tackle challenges raised in particular by enlargement. Aiming at a more strategic approach and giving more autonomy to the Member States, the new policy has been concentrated on three main objectives:

- convergence (81.5% of funds targeted at regions with a per capita GDP at less than 75 % of the Community average);
- regional competitiveness and employment (16%);
- European territorial cooperation (2.5%).

These objectives are to be met mostly through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (Member States whose GNI is lower than 90% of the EU average, but focusing on environmental and transport infrastructures). For the first time, strong coherence between cohesion policy and the Lisbon strategy is also required, with at least 60% of the funds (in convergence regions, 75% for competitiveness regions) being targeted at fields related to the Lisbon strategy. In this view, new financial instruments have also been created to support cooperation with the financial institutions, such as Jeremie, providing support for micro-business and SMEs.

### Not only roads and infrastructures: a tool to tackle exclusion

Focusing primarily on labour market measures, the European Social Fund created in 1957 has supported projects likely to bring people back into work (training, employability, lifelong learning), but also allowing for a wider integration

and empowerment of excluded groups (such as community projects, targeted social services). Yet, the European Social Fund and also significantly the European Regional Development Fund's contribution went beyond this, by providing support to capacity building for social NGOs, social economy initiatives and inclusive entrepreneurship approaches, but also infrastructures linked to social inclusion.

Over the period 2007-2013 some €5 billion will be distributed to the EU Member States and regions through the European Social Fund, which focuses on five priority themes in line with the European Employment Strategy:

- adaptability of workers;
- access to employment and inclusion of job seekers and "inactive people";
- social inclusion of disadvantaged people, including education and training, social economy, community and care services, fight against discrimination on the workplace;
- enhancing human capital;
- promoting partnership approaches (including social partners and NGOs from local to European level).

For Member States in the "Convergence Area" (mostly those that joined in or after 2004), another priority is also devoted to capacity-building of public services, social partners, but also non-governmental organisations. Such an opportunity to strengthen civil society should not be missed, but to be efficient it needs to be supported by specific approaches developed in partnership with the third sector itself and aimed at reaching out to the most excluded groups.

As illustrated by the priority themes above, the ESF's objective are thus clearly in line with the current trend towards a "growth and jobs approach",

### USEFUL LINKS

**EAPN structural funds manual (2006) :**  
[http://www.eapn.org/code/en/publ\\_detail.asp?pk\\_id\\_content=1748](http://www.eapn.org/code/en/publ_detail.asp?pk_id_content=1748)

#### Institutions

**Inforegio website :** [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm)

**List of managing authorities :** [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/manage/authority/authority\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/manage/authority/authority_en.cfm)

**Country fact sheets :** [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/atlas2007/fiche\\_index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/fiche_index_en.htm)

**Structural funds regulations :** [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/newregl0713\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/newregl0713_en.htm)

**European Social Fund :** [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/esf/](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/)

**URBACT (cities and their neighbourhoods):**  
[http://urbact.eu/no\\_cache/home.html](http://urbact.eu/no_cache/home.html)

**INTERREG (interregional cooperation) :**  
<http://www.interreg4c.net/>

**Jeremie (micro-finance) :** [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/funds/2007/jij/jeremie\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funds/2007/jij/jeremie_en.htm)

#### NGOs

**European Disability Forum :** [http://www.edf-feph.org/Page\\_Generale.asp?DocID=13854&thebloc=13858](http://www.edf-feph.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=13854&thebloc=13858)

**CECODHAS (social housing) :** <http://www.cecodhas.org/content/view/full/14/31/>

**Friends of the Earth/CEE Bankwatch :**  
<http://www.foeeurope.org/billions/index.htm>

**World Wildlife Fund :** [http://www.panda.org/about\\_wwf/where\\_we\\_work/europe/what\\_we\\_do/epo/initiatives/regional\\_rural\\_dev/index.cfm](http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/europe/what_we_do/epo/initiatives/regional_rural_dev/index.cfm)

where social inclusion appears to be subordinated to economic and labour market goals. Yet the experience of EAPN members indicates it also led to positive developments on the ground: a key challenge for 2007-2013 will be to build on such steps to ensure the funds live up to their potential to fight exclusion.

### Challenges for 2007-2013

As a majority of programming documents have been adopted, EAPN is concerned that major opportunities are being missed to learn from lessons from past programmes and better deliver on inclusion.

Stronger spending on social inclusion measures - The new Cohesion Policy for 2007-2013 restates the importance of the social inclusion dimension in the Structural Funds. However, the emphasis on jobs, competitiveness and growth might hinder a rather holistic approach to socio-economic development which takes seriously into account the root causes of poverty. The funds should be instrumental in meeting the objectives of the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, and the coherence between the two processes be strengthened.



Building upon the strengthened partnership principle - For the first time, Article 11 of the Structural Funds regulation explicitly recognizes the principle of partnership with civil society organisations. Implementing partnership across the whole structural funds process is an obligation upon Member States. Yet the quality of dialogue in the elaboration of programming documents has been uneven across the EU, and there is little indication so far that lessons from the past have really been learnt for the next stages of delivery.

Providing the right framework for NGOs to access the funds - Social NGOs still face many obstacles to access structural funds: difficulty to use the funds for micro-projects, financial requirements, but also a lack of information and of capacity to follow-up project applications. Mechanisms do

exist to support them in accessing the funds, including training and specific financial schemes. Yet despite their mention in the structural funds regulation, such approaches have so far been promoted only in a minority of Member States (such as the UK, Portugal, Hungary, Malta, Spain, Slovenia, France).

A real follow-up of EQUAL - One of the success stories of the last round of structural funds was the EQUAL programme, operating on the basis of social inclusion, innovation, transnationality, empowerment and bottom-up approach. EQUAL has disappeared in the new programming period. While its principles should be integrated horizontally, there is so far no clear evidence that such a follow-up will take place. Spain appears to be one of the rare countries where the issue has been given high profile, with a specific Operational Programme devoted to the integration of excluded groups.

### What now?

Though the programming phase is coming to an end with the adoption of National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Operational Programmes, structural funds are not fixed once and for all: many channels still exist to develop innovative governance and projects. At this stage, priority should be given to promote, use and disseminate good practices from across the EU, which should be better known and used by NGOs themselves, but also management and monitoring committees.

On the mid-term, the current consultation on the future of EU cohesion policies but also the interim evaluation of structural funds will be important opportunities to stress that beyond economic convergence, structural funds can still be a tool for more social cohesion. Yet this will not happen without specific efforts, resources and structures, from the local to the EU level.

Elodie Fazi  
EAPN Policy officer

## WHAT ABOUT MICRO-CREDIT?

New financial instruments were also launched in this new programming period, which include the possibility of credit (and not only grant) facilities. Of particular interest might be the Joint European Resources for Micro to medium Enterprises (JEREMIE). Jeremie is an initiative of the European Commission, together with the European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund, to promote increased access to finance for the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in the regions of the EU. It is partly inspired from the local social capital initiative run by the Commission in 2001.

It enables all 27 EU Member States/regions to use part of their EU Structural Funds allocations (ERDF - European Regional Development Fund country allocation for 2007-2013) to support start-ups and micro-enterprises through loans, equity, venture capital and guarantees. National and regional authorities have to officially decide if they want to implement JEREMIE, as it is an option for the countries/region in the context of the implementation of the EU Structural Funds 2007-2013, but not an obligation.

Microcredit is one of the instruments which can be implemented under a national/regional JEREMIE portfolio, if a "market failure" in this field was determined by the gap analysis and the Managing Authority decides so.

JEREMIE should also be at the heart of the new EU Initiative on Micro-Financed, recently announced by the European Commission.

Elodie Fazi

For more information, please look at : <http://www.eif.org/jeremie/index.htm> and [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/funds/2007/jiv/jeremie\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funds/2007/jiv/jeremie_en.htm) for further information.

European Commission Communication on a European initiative for the development of Micro-Credit : [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007\\_0708en01.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0708en01.pdf)

## Transnational dimension and social inclusion: key channels for social NGOs

With the disappearance of EQUAL, the transnational dimension has become a key concern for social inclusion NGOs. We give you an overview of some key channels that should ensure a transnational dimension in social inclusion work.

### Transnational dimension within the European Social Fund

It is mostly up to the Member States to ensure the follow-up of EQUAL, by integrating a transnational dimension in relation to social inclusion priorities within their ESF operational programmes. Yet it is still early to know how this will take place in practice.

### INTERREG IVC

With a structural funds contribution of 321 million EUR, Interreg IVC provides a framework for the exchange of experiences between regional and local institutions in different countries. There are two priorities: innovation and the knowledge economy and environment and risk prevention.

Social inclusion is primarily seen through employment and human capital, and potential projects identified include local employment development and participation of discriminated groups.

Interreg IVC is primarily targeted at regions and local authorities, but "private bodies" can participate in the operations (at their own costs) or take part in the implementation of certain activities.

### URBACT II

With a structural funds contribution of 53 million EUR, Urbact II brings together actors at local and regional level to exchange experience and facilitate learning on urban policy themes. Urbact supports thematic networks and working groups, conferences and the development of tools. Social inclusion is tackled through different aspects: employment and human capital, development of deprived areas and social cohesion. Although NGOs are not recognized as direct project partners, they are key partners in terms of integrated development of deprived areas.

## NGO Access to the Funds: A shaky evolution or shaking the foundations?

Vladimir Spidla, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities, recently announced that the new Structural Funds Programme 2007-2013 is subject to 6 drivers: regional flexibility, ownership, partnership, innovation, transnational cooperation and simplification.

**S**ignificantly, with regard to "ownership", Vladimir Spidla emphasised the crucial role of NGOs in bringing the most socially and economically disadvantaged adults into the field of action. Such organisations are being seen as the key means of ensuring that people are the subjects, not just the objects, of social change.

Yet, as we look across the 27 EU Member States and view the slowly evolving Operational Programmes, under the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), we are often frustrated by the absence of clear mechanisms to ensure that NGOs are fully embraced in the design and delivery of projects.

For the moment, apart from the mainstream inroads into the Funds where providers from all sectors are in open competition, three particular opportunities exist for NGO access: global grants; capacity building; and technical assistance (TA).

Small grant programmes, formerly known as 'global grants' and modelled on the original 1997-1999 ESF Pilot Local Social Capital, can still be found in the 2007-2013 Programme. Early signs indicate that they are being initiated in Hungary and repeated in the UK. Discussions are underway in several Member States to target ESF on small providers. In England, for example, a new 2-tier scheme @ 100% funding for NGOs is being introduced: a micro-project Community Grants Programme with grants up to €700 per annum and a complementary scheme under the main social inclusion Priority with grants up to €5000.

In the newly designated Convergence Areas, funds for capacity building are generally available within the institutional/governance measures. As this finance is not necessarily earmarked for

NGOs, community and voluntary projects have to compete with bids from other sectors. Even so, some governments are taking the initiative to target funds on NGOs. Thus, in Slovenia, the government is making a commitment in the Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources to the "qualitative development of the non-governmental sector": both in the allocation of €3.4m to the development of the administrative-capacity Priority; and to the 7% total OP HRD indicative share of resources worth €3m.

The overall situation with Technical Assistance remains very unclear. This funding is a type of capacity-building finance which is dedicated to the actual delivery of ESF and ERDF Operational Programmes. In this way, TA is focussed on the design, delivery and evaluation of Structural Fund projects from all sectors.

**NGOs lobby to shake the very foundations of this 2007-2013 Structural Funds**

At the level of the European Commission, the historical position with regard to targeting TA has been that officials "do not envisage the distribution" of such assistance. However, EU level useful discussions are now underway between EAPN and the Commission to explore the scope for reviewing this position.

Meanwhile, within Member States, progress with TA is also slow. Intense discussions between government and NGO networks are continuing across the English regions, whilst NGO networks have recorded early successes in winning TA funds in Malta, Portugal and France.

Although this evolution may appear "shaky", NGO practitioners continue to lobby at all levels and to shake the very foundations of this 2007-2013 Structural Funds Programme, which has been launched with promises from on high to promote effective partnership across all sectors.

*Ray Phillips*

*Director of the London Voluntary Sector Training Consortium*

## Structural funds in practice: Two different experiences...

When it comes to accessing the structural funds, experiences varies greatly from country to country. Discover stories from Portugal and Slovenia...

**P**

### Portugal: Strengthening the capacity of social NGOs

The project Acreditar – Agência de Consultoria Social was promoted by EAPN Portugal, in partnership with the Portuguese Catholic University and the District Union of the Social Solidarity Organisations, in the framework of the Community Initiative EQUAL. Taking place between 2005 and 2007, it aimed at promoting models and strategies to strengthen the capacity of social NGOs, in particular in the field of quality management, strategic planning and sustainability. 12 organisations from the Porto district took part in the project, which was organised around four types of activities:

- Post-graduate course in “Management of Non - Profit Organisations” – opened to staff members in charge of strategic development within their organisation;
- Training Courses – adapted to the specific needs of each organisation. They focused on individual, group and organisational competences;
- Working Groups – which provided an opportunity for dialogue and mutual learning between the different NGOs taking part in the project;
- Support and follow-up – for each organisation supported, a sub-team closely followed-up the quality development process (social qualification consultancy).

The qualification process was followed by various phases so as to integrate the model developed in the framework of the project. In particular, the training courses and working groups led to the development of Guidelines for Organizational Qualification, main output of the project. The Guidelines identify qualification strategies and mechanisms adapted to the sector, as well as illustrate the qualification paths followed by the organisations that took part in the project.

*Maria José Vicente  
EAPN Portugal*

**S**

### Slovenia: How to implement a NGO Plan for Voluntary Sector Development if the public officials know better

It is difficult to say that there is a non-governmental sector in Slovenia. If we understand that a sector is represented by common programmes/instruments and umbrella institutions, we cannot say that these forms are available to NGOs in Slovenia, with the exception of a few networks primarily working on a voluntary basis and lacking suitable conditions.

Against this background, three main national NGO networks harmonized their operation in February 2007 to form a common development strategy via an expert committee. The purpose was to give more detailed definition, within the Operational Programme, to the Priority entitled: »Stimulation of the Development of NGOs, civil and social dialogue in the period 2007 - 2013«. On the bases of the sector's needs already recognized in past analyses and of project outlines submitted by various NGOs, the committee drafted the “Programme Plan for the Period 2007 - 2013” to give the Priority more detailed definition and content to guide the Ministry for Public Administration as the Managing Authority.

Unfortunately, our initial fears proved justified when the Ministry mainly rejected our Plan, accepting only a small part. This leaves our sector to question whether there is anything else at all to be done. Apparently, the Ministry knows much more about voluntary sector development than the sector itself!

Surely, only NGOs themselves can answer the question of how to identify and define what is necessary for the sector's improved operation!

*Robert Levicar  
Agency for Development Initiatives*

## WHICH TYPES OF PROJECTS CAN BE SUPPORTED?

Pathways to employment for refugees, involving local parents in the planning of community activities, innovative service for blind people, , healthcare and ICT training, capacity-building for community groups, summer programmes for disadvantaged youth....

These are only a few examples of what structural funds have done to fight against exclusion. You can find more examples of projects by visiting the websites of some of these programmes:

- London Voluntary Sector Training Consortium : <http://www.lvstc.org.uk/>
- Fast forward grants programme, delivered in the London Region : <http://www.gle.co.uk/services/Programmes/FFG.htm?id=23>
- Catalyst programme (East Midland) : <http://www.catalystfund.org.uk/index.htm>
- Website of the Luis Vives Foundation : (Spain) <http://www.fundacionluisvives.org/areas/pse/fse/index.html>
- Structural funds training programme for NGOs active in social inclusion (Malta) : <http://www.mrc.org.mt/page.asp?p=8680>

## EQUAL was...

- A 6 year (2001-2006) programme with...
- 3 billion € of the European Social Fund (ESF) invested in labour market development...
- implemented through more than 3000 development partnerships with...
- more than 20.000 partners and...
- reaching over 1,5 million persons in Europe.

The ESF - like many competitive industrial firms - invested 5% in the development and testing of new products, services and production processes; EQUAL was the ESF Research & Development department.

*Gerhard Braeunling,  
Head of Section at DG  
Employment and Social Affairs*

*Responsible for coordination  
of all mainstreaming activities  
linked to the EQUAL principles*

## Is there a life after EQUAL? Interview with the European Commission

The end of the EQUAL programme raises a number of questions for social inclusion NGOs which found in this programme an important catalyst to exchange good practices on key inclusion issues. Almost a year after the start of the new programming period, a widespread fear remains that the lessons learnt from EQUAL might get lost and are not sufficiently taken into account in the new round of programmes. EAPN has thus approached Gerhard Braeunling, Head of Section at DG Employment and Social Affairs and responsible for coordination of all mainstreaming activities linked to the EQUAL principles, to learn more about what to expect for the next months.

**Q: What are the main lessons to be retained from the EQUAL programme, which has now come to an end?**

*A: EQUAL has promoted innovation and new approaches in labour market and social inclusion policy and delivery, thereby contributing to make the European Social Fund (ESF) a more effective, efficient and relevant instrument for the labour market and social inclusion.*

*EQUAL gave priority to exploring and testing new ways of facilitating transition between institutions and work environments, such as robust bridges between education and work; inactivity and work; prison and work; migration and work; and balance between family/private life and work, and between work and life-long learning.*

*Partnership has been a key feature of the management of EQUAL. It is through partnerships that it becomes possible to reach out to people in cities, in regions and at local level; in fact there are few or no alternatives to partnerships as a means to involving the local actors directly, and to work across institutional boundaries and responsibilities.*

**Q: How can we make sure that these lessons are not lost and that the EQUAL principles are efficiently integrated in the new programmes?**

*A: There is no dedicated programme to replace EQUAL for 2007-13. But the ESF Regulation asks Member States and regions to integrate the lessons learnt from EQUAL into the new ESF programmes. This refers not only to good practice in delivering inclusive labour market policies, but also to good governance of programmes, by promoting partnership, transnational cooperation, innovative actions and gender mainstreaming.*

**Q: EQUAL had played an important role for the engagement of NGOs with structural funds. How can we make sure its end does not result in less partnership compared to 2000-2006?**

*A: Based on the EQUAL experience, the ESF regulation provides obligations and opportunities to establish and support partnership arrangements:*

- at programme level, in particular through the partnership on the Programme monitoring committees, and
- at project level, through the involvement of social partners and adequate participation of NGOs.

**Q: The Commission has a lesser supervising role in structural funds than in the previous programming period. What will be its overall responsibility and that of the Member States, with regard to the follow-up of EQUAL?**

*A: The Commission's role has been, during the negotiations, to ensure that the approach of, and the lessons learnt from, EQUAL have been incorporated in the new programmes.*

*It will continue to provide assistance to Member States and regions, in particular to facilitate learning from one another, through identifying and disseminating good practice and encouraging mutual learning and transnational and inter-regional cooperation, e.g. through exchanges of experience, awareness-raising activities, seminars, networking and peer reviews.*

*Interview: Elodie Fazi*



## Social situation in Slovakia: highest unemployment rate in the EU-27

The Slovak economy underwent mass industrialisation under the communist regime, with a production oriented to the Soviet Union market. The disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991) plunged it into a deep recession.

**G**DP fell by 23% in 1993 from its 1990 level. Industrial employment contracted by 24% between 1989 and 1994. Agricultural production fell by 43% from 1990 to 2000. Unemployment rose from just 1.5% in 1990 to 18 – 19% in 1998 (standing at about 13% in 2007).

Rural communities, especially Roma, were hardest hit. Daily commuting was made harder by the removal of public transport subsidies, while the halt in public housing construction made moving to towns for work difficult. In 2004, estimated unemployment among the Roma minority was 79.8% compared to the national average of 18.1%.

The social protection system developed in the 1990s, which guaranteed a minimum level of old-age pensions, unemployment benefits, parental benefits, birth allowance and social assistance benefits – the “subsistence minimum” - , was gradually run down. Social welfare became the main victim of the drive to stabilise public finances. “Generous social assistance” was blamed for high unemployment on the assumption that it discouraged benefit claimants from looking for work. Public stereotypes and prejudices against the Roma were used to “justify” the cuts.

Since 2002, people in need are no longer guaranteed a subsistence minimum. Cash benefits are not calculated on family size. The risk of falling into rent arrears has increased immensely. Reduced eligibility for and amounts of social assistance came amidst deregulation of water, energy and other housing service prices.

Notwithstanding the growth in the Slovak economy, Slovakia still has the highest proportion of long term unemployed in the EU-27. An active labour market policy, foreign investment, job crea-

tion and freedom to seek work abroad have created few openings for the long term-unemployed so far. Living in a jobless household is a daily reality for more than one in ten children in Slovakia: it is the fifth highest level in the EU.

According to EU-SILC 2005 data, 12.4% of households had great difficulty and 19.2% of households had difficulty in making ends meet in Slovakia in 2004. Paying all housing costs is a big burden for 38% of Slovak households, for instance. Families with children make up 73% of poor households (EU -25: 58 %). There are relief programmes for poor children, but the recent survey of jobless households with children reports serious problems. Barely a quarter of children can attend after-school activities and sport clubs without restriction. More than

40% of parents reported that they had cut out such spending on their children completely.

The new social-democratic government Programme Manifesto (2006) claims that “social cohesion and increasing the quality of life for all are to be pursued jointly with the goals of economic growth, economic performance and employment growth.” However, commitments to the Maastricht criteria and the aim of joining the Euro zone in 2009 seem to attract much greater support from interest groups than a commitment to people’s social rights. The underprivileged still lack a voice to put their limited access to social rights on the public agenda.

“Generous social assistance” was blamed for high unemployment

Zuzana Kusa

Slovak Anti-Poverty Network

## Spotlight on the Slovak Anti-Poverty Network

The Slovak Anti-Poverty Network (SAPN) started working informally in 2004, but was not formally registered until the end of 2006. It became an official member of EAPN at the EAPN 2007 General Assembly held in Budapest.

SAPN takes a human rights-based approach to poverty. It supports the goals and activities of the European Anti-Poverty Network, and operates on the basis of participation, partnership and solidarity.

Although still a relatively young organization, SAPN links together more than two dozen NGOs with strong front-line social work experience, and academic backgrounds.

The Network aims to pool NGOs and voluntary groups’ forces in a more efficient drive to put the struggle against poverty on the public agenda, with a focus on human rights. It does this by commenting on how social legislation impacts on the most vulnerable groups, and by getting media coverage of ignored local and regional situations that are at odds with the European Social Charter and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

SAPN is working to create a forum of non-profit organisations and academic experts to exchange experiences, information and good practice, but also to take a critical stance on domestic policies aimed at achieving delivering the Nice common objectives (2001) under the Open Method of Coordination on social inclusion and tackling poverty.

Ivan Lesay

Slovak Anti Poverty Netw

## Homelessness conference reveals lack of basic homeless services in most Slovak towns

**T**he first national conference on homelessness held on 14–15 November 2007 in Liptovský Ján (northern Slovakia) was attended by 90 participants from 50 different organizations (NGOs, local councils, churches) and 36 towns and villages. It was financed by the European Social Fund and the EQUAL Programme.

The Proti prúdu (Against the Stream) voluntary organization – a founding member of the Slovak Anti-Poverty Network – was the main organiser. Proti prúdu has been working with homeless people since 2001, chiefly through producing and distributing the street newspaper *Nota Bene* (now in 19 towns across Slovakia).

The conference participants included not only front-line workers with the homeless, but also officials from various umbrella organizations and research institutions. Some participants had themselves experienced homelessness.

The conference provided a forum space for learning about and from one another, exchanging experiences and drawing inspiration from talks by home-grown and foreign experts on social work, local social policy, legislation, housing policies, etc.

A big place was given over to the experience of organisations that provide holistic care for homeless people. Impressive documentary films

were also shown on the work done by different groups.

The discussions revealed that the problems most commonly faced by social workers and homeless services providers are under-funding, inappropriate premises for activities, poor cooperation from decision-makers and failings in the legislation.

This prompted the setting-up of an eleven organisation working group to prepare comments on and proposals for the social services Bill which, when it becomes law, will have a crucial impact on access to and the scope of social services. One aim is to broaden the remit of homeless services from meeting basic needs to promoting quality of life and social inclusion.

The participants also agreed a joint statement, voicing their concerns about the shortage of basic social services for homeless people in most Slovak towns.

A survey done during the conference found that 80% of participating cities lacked sufficient hostel capacities and almost half the participants thought their home towns were inadequately prepared to care for the homeless in the coming winter.

*Ivan Lesay*  
Slovak Anti-Poverty Network



Surf to us at...  
**WWW.eapn.org**

**Our objective:**  
Make structural funds  
a better tool against  
exclusion

N° 124  
October-December 2007

printed  
in English and French  
and also available in other languages  
at [www.eapn.org](http://www.eapn.org)

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*Network News* aims to generate debates on specific themes. The views expressed are not necessarily those of EAPN. If you want to comment on the content of this issue, send an email to [team@eapn.skynet.be](mailto:team@eapn.skynet.be)

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