EAPN Capacity Building Seminar: Building for a more effective engagement in the OMC Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-11. 29th February 2008

Background

Over the last year, the EAPN has been actively assessing the value and effectiveness of EAPN's engagement with the OMC and in particular with the National Action Plans on Inclusion. The findings were summarised in the Light Year Report, and discussed at the Social Inclusion Working Group meeting in Seville. The main conclusions were that that despite the shortcomings of the current process, the OMC still offered one of the best instruments for making an impact on poverty and social exclusion in the EU. Therefore EAPN should continue to be actively engaged. However, there was a need to move forward and work more effectively on the Open Method of Coordination at all levels. 2008 will see the launch of a new NAP for 2008-11 therefore now is the right time for EAPN to build capacity to engage in its development and implementation.

The Social Inclusion Working Group recognized that a key barrier to more effective work and impact was **the different level of experience and perceptions in the enlarged network** (with currently 24 members). On the one hand, there were a significant number of **new members** in the Working Group who did not understand the complexities of the OMC. There are also many older members who have been active for over 5 years, but who feel the need to review the usefulness of the engagement, both in terms of the impact at EU and national level, and to see how then can increase the value-added for their national work. A capacity building seminar was therefore proposed to rejuvenate EAPN involvement and approach at national and EU level to the OMC, to develop better capacity for engagement and clearer messages for policy impact.

Aim and Objectives
The main aim of the capacity building seminar was to achieve a new momentum on EAPN's engagement with the NAP/OMC and to promote more effective engagement at national and EU level.

The specific objectives included:
- Raising awareness amongst members of what the OMC is, what it has achieved and what are the benefits of engagement in the NAP inclusion for EAPN members.
- Building capacity amongst members of how the process works at national and EU level and how to develop better strategies for engagement, testing a new draft tool kit.
- Promoting mutual learning between networks related to their current experience and start new process of on-going exchange linked to website.
- Moving forward and building momentum for our work in 2008 by honing clearer key messages and a clearer lobbying strategy on the OMC for the 2008 year.

Expected Outcomes/outputs
- Improved engagement in NAP and SPSI (both in terms of number of networks engaging and the quality of engagement and impact).
- A revised Tool Kit to be placed on website and adapted for national networks.
- Summaries of members' actions and good practices, linked to members' page on website.
- Key messages for 2008.

Practical Details

The event was held on the **29th March in the Social Platform Offices**, from 9-5.30 in English and French, with a total participation of 33 participants (24 EAPN national network members, 2 European Organisations and 3 from EAPN Secretariat..

.Final Programme

EAPN Capacity Building Workshop *Making the most of the OMC* *Friday 29th February, Social Platform, Brussels* *Final Programme*

Session 1	Getting Started: What we want to achieve and how we will do it
Timing	Content
9.00 – 9.30	• Welcome and introduction to participants. • Introduction to aims of workshop and programme. • Affirming expectations – pair work. • Introduce question sheet[1] **Facilitator:** Sian Jones **Chair/Speaker:** Katherine Duffy
Session 2	**What is the OMC? Understanding better how the NAP inclusion/Strategic Report works.**
9.30 – 11.00 10.30	• History of the OMC and EAPN involvement • Key Elements of the OMC and Guidance Document (2008-11) • Role of Desk Officer and hints for engagement • Discussion with participants • Short group activity – Quiz on the OMC using tool kit(30 mins) **Speakers:** • Fintan Farrell, Director of EAPN. • Peter Lelie, Policy Coordinator, Social Inclusion Unit,DG Employment and Social Affairs. • Eoin O'Seaghdha, Desk Officer, DG Employment and Social Affairs. **Chair: Katherine Duffy**.
11.00– 11.30	Coffee and Tea Break
Session 3	Benefits of engagement and lessons learnt by EAPN
11.30 – 1.00 12.15	• Introduction o Roundtable inputs from EAPN networks' experience (3 x 10 mins):UK, Spain, Czech Republic o Main achievements, what has worked ,what has not, lessons learnt. • Small group work based on national experiences (prepared fiches o What has worked and what has not, lessons learnt. • Feedback on posters. **Chair: Werner Binnenstein** **Speakers**: Katherine Duffy, Graciela Malgesini, Katarina Klamkova **Small group facilitators**: Katherine Duffy, Sergio Aires,Werner Binnenstein.

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[1] Posters will be placed on the walls where people can write up any questions about EAPN or the EU policy process or content which will be dealt with at the end of the day and in further follow-up.

1.00 – 2.00	Lunch
Session 4	**Getting the most out of the NAP inclusion (Strategic Report) at national level in 2008**

2.00 – 3.30	• Introduction in plenary – The next steps: developing policy proposals for national level.
	• Individual then small group work (3):
	   – Clarifying key demands/concerns.
	   – Developing proposals at national level (2008 – 2010)
	• Feedback session in plenary.
	
	Chair: Sergio Aires
	Facilitators: small groups: Katherine Duffy, Sergio Aires, Werner Binnenstein.

3.30 – 4.00	**Coffee and Tea Break**
Session 5	**Developing our demands at EU level**
4.00 – 5.00 4.45	• Introduction • What should be core EAPN demands? (Brainstorm) • Prioritising activity • Responses to posted questions.. • Initial conclusion and evaluation – review of expectations. • Practical arrangements for Saturday. **Chair:** Katherine Duffy **Facilitator:** Sian Jones
5.00	**End of Workshop**

Report from Workshop

Participants

The workshop was well attended by existing and new EAPN networks, totalling 33 participants during most of the workshop. Most of the participants were from national networks, but also included representatives from FEANTSA from the EAPN European Organisations members. Sian Jones and Tanya Basara provided support from the secretariat, together with specific inputs from the EAPN Director, Fintan Farrell. Our thanks go to Peter Lelie, Policy coordinator from the Social Inclusion Unit in the Commission and EAPN contact point and Eoin O' Seoghad, the Irish Desk Officer, as well as from the representatives who provide input from three national networks:

- Katherine Duffy: EAPN UK
- Graciela Malesigne: EAPN Spain
- Katarina Klamkova, EAPN CZ.

The meeting was chaired by Katherine Duffy, chair of the EAPN social inclusion working group and Sergio Aires (vice-chair).

Session 1: Getting Started: What we want to achieve and how we will do it.

Introduction

The session started with a welcome to all participants and a presentation round. The chair, Katherine Duffy, outlined the aims and programme for the workshop. She emphasized the need to balance the information input at the beginning of the day, with the need for active sharing of experience and perspectives on current activity and how to improve EAPN impact in the future. The emphasis of the day was to be on mutual learning and moving towards a common vision.

Highlighting Expectations

The day"s activities started with a warmer. The participants were asked to work in pairs to highlight their expectations of the day for 10 minutes, then feed this back to the group. The Secretariat highlighted that a question sheet would be put on the wall, for participants to place any questions related to the workshop or any other question during the day. These were answered at the end of the day.

Summary of Feedback

Newer members emphasized their interest in getting information, building capacity and getting support for engaging at a national level. The older members hoped more for some new ideas and inspiration and to move forward to a stronger common vision.

Key points of Interest

- Finding out what national networks were doing: activities, successes and problems.
- Looking for inspiration and new ideas.
- Reflecting on EAPN and its role. How strong are we? How to make an impact on 2010?
- Hearing experiences of involvement in the OMC – a chance to reflect and hone better strategies.
- Improving capacity at a national level – ie finding out about the OMC and how they could make use of it and get their national network more involved.
- Understanding better the benefits of getting involved in the OMC and engaging more in EAPN work at EU level.
- Looking for ideas and information to develop a more common vision at national and EU level.
- Some tips on how to get over the process to ordinary members.

Session 2: What is the OMC? Understanding better how the NAP Inclusion and the Strategic Report works

The aim of this session was to provide an overview of the history and key elements of the Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion, focussing on the NAP Inclusion and the Strategic Report. It also highlighted current new developments for 2008-11, summarising the key new aspects of the new Guidance Note. An appraisal was also provided of EAPN's specific role and input into the development of the process as well as analysing how the governance process was working and could be improved. The Commission officers Peter Lelie and Eoin O'Seoghad, provided valuable insights into the new developments and also the key role of the Commission Desk Officer.

The **methodology** was through a plenary session with 3 presentations (see powerpoints), followed by a question, answer and debate session. The session ended with a quiz which the participants were encouraged to work through in pairs. The answers were supplied at the end of the afternoon.

History of the OMC and EAPN involvement: *Fintan Farrell, Director of EAPN*
Fintan Farrell outlined the history of the OMC, starting with the Poverty programmes in the 80's and early 90's which lead to the proposal of Article 126 and 127 in the Amsterdam Treaty, and a campaign for a European strategy and process to combat poverty. The Amsterdam Treaty set out the agreement to the European Employment Strategy, where many of the key elements of the OMC were proposed, (including common objectives, National Action Plans, reports, indicators, peer reviews, but not named as such.) EAPN then lobbied intensively during the Finnish Presidency 1999 for a similar approach to social inclusion, and for the establishment of the target of 2010 to have a decisive impact on poverty and social exclusion and the proposal of a similar community method. The Open Method of Coordination was established following the Lisbon Council

.EAPN has continued to lobby intensively over the functioning of the OMC and has been a key actor, in the setting up of the Round Tables and the People experiencing Poverty meetings as well as engaging through their networks in the National Action Plans on Inclusion. Since 2005, when the EU has revised the Lisbon strategy to focus on jobs and growth, and "streamlined" social inclusion with the EU processes on pensions, health and long-term care, EAPN has been fighting for greater visibility of the social dimension in the revised Lisbon strategy, ensuring that it delivers on social inclusion and to ground the OMC in a dynamic active governance approach based on the National Action Plans for Inclusion, with broad stakeholder involvement.

Key elements of the OMC and the new Guidance Note for the new cycle: 2008-11:
Peter Lelie, Policy Coordinator from the Social Inclusion Unit, DG Employment. (See powerpoint presentation)
Peter Lelie, summarised the key elements of the OMC and the developments that led to streamlining of the process in 2005 and the revision of the Lisbon strategy, due to disappointing implementation gap on the ground. After summarising the key points from last years "light thematic year" focus on child poverty, he highlighted changes agreed for the new cycle and the key elements of the Guidance Note developed by the Commission to support the development of the National Strategic Reports this year. Peter emphasized that although the new note was substantially based on the previous note drafted by Hugh Frazer, key new changes that had been introduced following the contributions of EAPN and other NGOs. These included:
- a specific new section on the integration of migrants and ethnic minorities in the assessment of the social situation,

- stronger guidance on the need for interaction between the OMC and Growth and Jobs Strategy, with an emphasis on showing the contribution of Lisbon to social inclusion (feeding out) and with the sustainable development strategy
- extension of good governance arrangements to the "light or thematic years", with reference to the 2007 peer review on the Irish Social Inclusion Forum emphasizing principles of quality of participation.
- Increased focus on monitoring and evaluation and impact, with targets and improved indicators and with member states being asked to identify how policy lessons have been learnt and policies adapted.
- Need for continuity – show impact on child poverty and active inclusion policies, without neglecting broader objectives, as well as a clear link to 2010.

The role of the Desk Officer and hints for improving engagement: Eoin O' Seoghad, Desk Officer for Ireland, UK and Latvia.
Eoin O' Seoghad outlined the main functions of the Desk Officer in DG Employment which included;
- Drafting of the country 'fiche' for the Commission's Assessments of National Strategy Reports on Social Inclusion and Social Protection;
- Monitoring and assessing all relevant policy developments in MS;
- Participating in relevant SPC and other peer reviews
- Following relevant research on SI & SP developments in the MS
- Preparing and contributing to briefings
- Maintaining contact to key partners in the MS
- Contributing to Commission and Member State events;
- Most Desk officers also do similar work related to the National Reform Programme and Structural Funds.

He highlighted that EAPN and other social NGOs had a key role to play by providing a different perspective, reflecting the reality of life for people experiencing poverty and exclusion and Identifying key issues. Most Desk Officers welcomed the information provided. It was therefore worth forwarding information and establishing good contact with them.

Questions/Discussion
    Q: What was the best way of influencing the National Action Plan?
    A: No easy answer, as it differed in each member state. Knowing the process and establishing good relations with the Government and Commission officials was vital.
    Q: How to get information on the road map - ie when drafts should be prepared and meetings held?
    A: This information wasn't available yet, and was being finalized. The Social Inclusion Unit probably could make this public. EAPN will try to include it in the Tool Kit.
    Q: How did they distinguish their role between the different pillars – NRP, OMC and Structural Funds.
    A: This wasn't easy, and the timing of the processes didn't work very well, so input from one didn't always easily allow for transfer to the others. Desk officers are unusual in knowing what is in all of them and the relationship between them.
- **The focus on Migrants will it include asylum seekers?**
    A: They weren't sure, but FEANTSA's information from current work is that it wouldn't.
- **How independent are the Desk Officers and the Independent Experts?**
    A: Independence is a difficult subject. Many Desk officers and Commission Adminstrators are national experts, from national governments, however most are committed to the priorities of

their current job, which can lead to conflict with their previous organizations. This also applies to Independent experts. Desk Officers are asked to assess how independent they are.

Session 3: Benefits of engagement and lessons learnt by EAPN

This session aimed to highlight the experience of different EAPN national networks in engaging with the NAP Inclusion, following very different models of engagement, and to exchange information on their successes, setbacks and lessons learnt.

The session opened with three presentations presenting experiences and good practice from three national networks, actively engaged currently in the OMC. The Group then split into working groups to discuss main achievements - what has worked ,what has not, lessons learnt.

Presentations of the National EAPN experience in the OMC

1) **EAPN UK: Katherine Duffy, Chair of the EAPN social Inclusion Working Group**
EAPN UK works only on the NAP Inclusion, through the Social Policy Task Force which is a working group involving EAPN and the UK coalition against poverty and individual NGOs including AGE, ATD 4th World etc. This group has met together every two months since 2000 and with the Government Department of Work and Pensions responsible for the process since 2002/3. It is the official dialogue partner on the UK NAP, which means they see and comment on drafts, take part in the NAP stakeholder group and NAP related events, input into the design of events and projects and contribute written submissions on related areas eg active inclusion.
The main achievements have been the establishment of the NAP architecture, stakeholder involvement and events, but nothing has been institutionalized or mainstreamed. On policy – they have influenced: housing benefit regulation, debt, working poverty, volunteer expenses for those on minimum income and cost of benefit advice lines.
Main problems are the lack of resources and member states priorities not being driven by the EU, as well as lack of institutionalization.
Key lessons are concerns about whether the OMC is national action or national theatre and the need for core funding for national networks.

2) **Graciela Malgesini, EAPN Spain, Member of the EAPN Planning Group on Social Inclusion**
EAPN Spain has been involved since the beginning of the OMC. Their main actions have been participating in consultations, promoting reference tools for other NGOs, proposing measures, particularly in the fields of assessment, objectives and actions. New developments have included the development of strategies for inclusion at regional level and in the new phase of local plans for inclusion. EAPN participates in the State Council for NGOs for Social Action (a joint body of public authorities and NGOs) . At regional level, EAPN regional branches are the main interlocutor and EAPN has been active through awareness raising seminars, together with the Luis Vives Foundation.
Main achievements: getting better consultation with NGOs and agreement to carry out the assessment of the 2008-11 NAP, as well as being chosen to develop a methodological gide for participation of people experiencing poverty in the actions and policies.
Main problems: The lack of impact on all the 10 principal social policy objectives, however this has led to the definition of 5 new priority areas. The lack of mainstreaming is another weakness.
Key lessons: Social inclusion is still not a priority for public authorities, but the active participation of NGOs can have an impact. However, NGO's cannot be just demanding measures, but need to qualify their contributions. The inclusion strategy needs to be better integrated in the main core work of NGOs.

3) **EAPN CZ: Katarina Klamkova,**(See powerpoint presentations.)

Summaries from Workshops

Workshop 1.	Workshop 2: Lessons learnt
Key Achievements • Recognized intermediary with people experiencing poverty • Interlocutors on NAP and 2010. • Direct involvement of PEP • Good personal relations with Government reps/Commission/SPC • Developing strong partnerships with other actors eg Local authorities. • Strong national campaigns eg Minimum Income using ombudsmen showing contrary to human rights.(NOR) **Impact on Policy/Process** • Policy on electricity provision – no cut offs. • Impact on design of indicators on poverty and process • Participatory governance processes. • Increased commitment and action on social inclusion and OMC/ and 2010 (AU) • Impact on debate on Minimum Income (Belgium, Norway and Austria) • Increase priority to child poverty • Agreement to user participation in new one-stop shop employment ser vice • Better definition, funding for homeless project, new policies and participation. **Key challenges** • Need to build a task force with focussed timeline to achieve and monitor results. • Press for more measurement/indeicators and implementation. • Need more resources – financial, staff, time. • Think through how to involve PEP. • Is the NAP the right focus – more impact outside the NAP. • Overlimited objectives – eg housing, employment, child poverty and loss of broader approach. • Lack of follow-up of previous priorities.	• More resources for listening to people in poverty • OMC should be treasured but need evaluation and impact assessment. • More selective approach. • Reinforce national/regional/European alliances. • EAPN should go beyond the OMC and NAP process • Don't be afraid of thematic approaches (Active Inclusion) • Go to local level – LAPs • NAP is one strategic tool , but not the end of the story.

Workshop 3
Priorities
• Campaign on Minimum Income
• Target/Work Groups
    o Disability
    o Children
    o Integration and migrants
    o Gender
    o Older people
    o Working Poor
    o One parent family
 	
Good Practice
• Poverty and Wealth Report (Germany)
• Strategy – Easy Read (UK-Wales)
• Children's Play Strategy.(UK)
• Conferences – People experiencing Poverty (Malta)
• Policy officers forum – Ireland.
	Workshop 4: Key Priorities.
	1.**Overall Approach**
	Strategy: eradicating poverty
	
	2.**Cross-cutting Life Cycle** – child/youth and older people
	
	3. **Focus on Effectiveness**
	Concept – results – measures- issues.
	
	4 **Better Communicating Strategies**.

Session 4	Getting the most out of the NAP inclusion (Strategic Report) at national level in 2008

The Fourth session aimed to get networks to look at how they were engaging with the National Action Plans and develop more effective strategies. Apart from the draft Tool Kit, a checklist on preparing a policy proposal/submission to the NAP Inclusion was presented. This was discussed briefly in the plenary. The participants broke into groups to discuss their preparation and how they could make it more effective, going through a step by step approach suggested through the checklist. The participants filled in individual sheets. The feedback session focussed on the policy priorities and demands.

Checklist for Preparing a Policy Proposal/Submission to the NAP Inclusion.

1. **What process will you follow?**
• *Who? - which organizations are you going to develop your proposal?*
• *How? – what kind of consultation are you going to do – meetings? focus groups? written input or through e-line discussions etc…?*
• *How? - are you going to involve/integrate People experiencing Poverty?*

2. **What policy priorities would you propose?**
• *What are the Governments priorities likely to be?*
• *What are your networks priorities? Are these different?*
• *Are you clear what is likely to have success*

3. **What proposals would you make on the NAP Inclusion Process?**
• *What is the process likely to be?*
• *Is it likely to be improved/get worse this year?*

Key National Priorities

The break-out groups fed back their national priorities and demands, which were then discussed in the plenary.

Although national networks were working on a wide range of issues and policy concerns and target groups, there was a strong common core of priorities/activities and demands.

Summary of Key Priorities and Demands

1. Human Rights focus and preventative approach to promote a decent life for all.
2. Adequate Minimum Income for a dignified Life
3. Homelessness and support for extreme poverty.
4. Social Economy as a tool for inclusion and developing community services.
5. Access to quality Housing
6. Early years support/education and learning linked to family support/effective measures for work/life balance
7. Right to Energy and affordable access to Services of General Interest – eg Transport, financial services.
8. Access to social services – including social, education and training, employment support etc.

Specific Target Groups

- Roma and Ethnic Minorities
- Migrants – documented and undocumented/ asylum-seekers.
- People with disabilities/Mental Health.
- Single parent families
- Early school leavers
- Working Poor

Key Discussion Points:
- The prime demand should be the overall eradication of poverty - this was the EAPN value-added to the policy debate.
- The value of lifecycle approaches was highlighted – but are they poverty proofed?
- Active Inclusion, is a useful concept, but misunderstood and abused at national level.
- We need to highlight concrete issues/rather than remain with overly generic analysis.
- EAPN has to be different, it's not a thematic NGO and must have an overview, focussing on a broad, integrated strategy.
- There is a widely different understanding of EU concepts which can be a problem at national level. This means a need to challenge Eurojargon = (eg feeding in and feeding out). EAPN should not fall into this trap and needs to challenge the jargon, whilst helping national members to use it.
- There should be an overarching demand for effective participatory impact and poverty assessment

Session 5	Developing our demands at EU level

The fifth session aimed to connect the work at the national level to EU level. The group discussed whether there could be a common list of priorities, policies or strategies that EAPN should promote as a common set of demands, and what could be the particular value-added.
The group brainstormed ideas, then were asked to prioritise.

Agreed priority themes were:
- **Minimum Income** was clearly a major theme for nearly all EAPN groups, although some networks felt it not a politically wise decision to focus on it, because of the predominant negative image of poverty and "scroungers".
- Most networks agreed that there was much to be gained for stressing the issues as part of the broader **Active Inclusion** strategy, with a particular emphasis on access to services of general interest, not just social services.
- The theme should also be linked clearly to **Flexicurity** (providing the definition and pre-requisites for security as a universal provision)
- **Governance** – NGO's still not treated as equal partners or access to all parts of the process. The NAP had to be implemented with NGO's as key actors, eg they should be part of the bilateral meetings with the Commission.
- Reference should be made to **extreme poverty**, without undermining the importance of relative poverty, although this could be conflictive.
- There was a need to make references to the **original and 2006 Objectives** of the OMC on social inclusion. These still provided the best, overarching, focus on multidimensional and integrated strategies, rather than an overly narrow thematic focus.
- Although the battle seem to have been lost on **yearly monitoring**, pressure should still be brought to bear by national networks on National Governments pushed to monitor/and give answers to their own stakeholders yearly, even if there was no EU process.

Some Key demands:
- A Demand for a Human Rights approach
- Reminder of the 2006 Objectives
- Need for specific target on poverty and social inclusion, backed by overarching, multidimensional and integrated strategy.
- Emphasis on a broad interpretation of Active Inclusion.

- Follow-up on Child Poverty – setting targets/integrated approaches which promote family and child well-being and escape from poverty.
- Focus on migrants, (undocumented), ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and the fights against discrimination.

What should EAPN do?

- EAPN should attempt to develop and negotiate a minimum common position between all the EU networks who work on poverty and social inclusion.
- We need to spell out the link with the revised Lisbon process – the National Reform Programmes and demand that the NRP must reflect the priorities of the NAP Inclusion, rather than the other way around. Links also with Structural Funds.
- Monitoring and Evaluation were crucial at national level on a regular, yearly basis – and should include poverty proofing.
- References should be made to beyond 2010.
- Our demands should be simple, easy to read and translate.
- We should be asking for hard, quantifiable targets.
- Governance – stronger emphasis should be made to the development and link to regional and local action plans.
- Renewed focus on promoting decent, quality work and a revision of the make work pay strategy ie by increasing wages and quality of work, rather than reducing benefits to make work attractive.
- We should send a message of going back to basics, underlining the original and 2006 Objectives,

It was agreed that the **Conclusions** of the day would be discussed in the Working Group meeting on the following day, together with the decision's on next steps.

For more information and copies of the powerpoint presentations contact Sian Jones at sian.jones@eapn.skynet.be.