

# **The contribution of meaningful Social Innovation to reducing poverty and social exclusion in Europe**

## **EAPN BOOKLET**



**EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group  
Task Force on Social Innovation  
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# INTRODUCTION

## *WHY A BOOKLET ON SOCIAL INNOVATION?*

Europe is currently facing a trend of increasing poverty and social exclusion, as well as worsening of living conditions. Around 125 million of people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU, which is equivalent to 24.8% of the total population (Eurostat, 2014:27). In this respect, the EU is moving away from the Europe 2020 poverty reduction target, since there were about 6.2 million more people living at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2012 than two years before, when the target was adopted. Equally, classic social protection tools for tackling the poverty and social exclusion have been steadfastly undermined by austerity measures, while strong concerns have been voiced about their effectiveness.

Social Innovation has become increasingly important in the policy framework of the EU, partly as a response to the austerity drive, as the interest of Governments to restrict public debt and spending through increased privatization and liberalization of social services, and partly as awareness that new alternatives to old solutions (both market and government) are needed, and that grass-roots organisations are well placed to develop such approaches.

In this context, anti-poverty NGOs need to push for those social innovations that are promoting social inclusion and that contribute to the decrease of poverty, rather than innovation at all costs, or even new solutions that may actually increase poverty, hardship and marginalisation on the ground. This Booklet aims at clarifying which specific types of social innovations are positive and can meaningfully contribute to improving social cohesion, quality of life, and wellbeing in Europe, as well as help to achieve the poverty reduction target of Europe 2020.

EAPN members recognized the need to develop a more systematic approach to social innovation within the current EU policy framework, in order to enable EAPN members to engage with such processes, as well as to gain consensus within the network about which kind of social innovation will be considered as desirable, beneficial, and worthy of promotion and pursuit. Aside defining positive social innovation, from the perspective of anti-poverty organisations, the Booklet aims at providing an overview of the threats and opportunities offered by this new approach, as new support in this area should not be used to undermine the large-scale commitment and responsibility of the State to ensure social inclusion and universal service provision.

## *HOW WAS THIS BOOKLET DEVELOPED?*

This Booklet was prepared by EAPN's Social Innovation Task Force (SITF), mandated by EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group. It includes EAPN's definition of good or meaningful social innovations, an overview of opportunities and threats provided by the social innovation framework, and checklist of criteria for good social innovation practices, function of which a number of good examples from the work of EAPN members, collected in October-November 2015, are showcased.

The Task Force consisted of **Marija Babović** (EAPN Serbia – Chair and main author of the Booklet), **Slavomíra Mareková** (EAPN Slovakia), **Aivars Lasmanis** (EAPN Latvia), **Elena De La Hera** (EAPN Spain), **Loredana Giuglea** (EAPN Romania), and **Krisztina Jász** (EAPN Hungary), with EAPN Secretariat support by **Amana Ferro**, Senior Policy Officer.

# EAPN's definition of Social Innovation

According to EAPN's view, social innovation should:

## ✓ **CONTRIBUTE TO COMBATING POVERTY AND IMPROVING SOCIAL INCLUSION**

Social innovation is meaningful only if it **contributes to the decrease of poverty, the improvement of wellbeing, and the promotion of social inclusion**, including by broadening the understanding of social exclusion and of the expectations of responsibilities the State and other actors have in relation to tackling social problems. It brings awareness of collective responsibilities, particularly in the present context, marked by numerous challenges.

## ✓ **FEATURE NOVELTY in the satisfaction of social needs in one more of the following aspects:**

⇒ **content** of needs satisfaction, which can be a product or service, and which answers to the question **what** is novel in needs satisfaction.

⇒ **method** of innovation, which can include new technologies, methods of delivery, new forms of organisation with new responsibilities, new relations, which answers **how** is the need satisfied.

⇒ **actors and agencies** of innovation, which can include old and new actors, new cross-sectorial partnerships, new interdisciplinary approaches, new coalitions of those who provide needs satisfaction (linking private, public, civil sector), but also those whose needs are being satisfied, which answers the question **who** provides and is being provided with social innovation services.

Novelty is understood in relative terms. A new product, service, practice, model or organisation does not have to be entirely new, **but new in the specific spatial or time context**. However, the relativity of innovation should not be confused with the transfer of practices or models.

There should be at least partly original novelty in the product, service, practice, model or organisation, if they are transferred from another context or time.

## ✓ **DRIVE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE**

Social Innovation should bring about **changes that are sustainable**, either in the form of long-term practices, or as one-off interventions that produce durable effects (e.g., providing identification documents to Roma people or migrants).

## ✓ **BE DRIVEN BY REAL SOCIAL NEEDS**

The innovation provides answers to the **real needs** of people and communities – those that are **newly emerged** due to the contextual changes, those that were **not previously met**, or at least **not adequately** (while reinforcing human rights, increased wellbeing, and social inclusion).

## ✓ **EMPOWER PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES**

Social innovation is meaningful only if it **empowers people** and not only directly – those who are clients, users or beneficiaries, but also indirectly – those who are part of the wider community where the intervention is taking place, therefore **empowering communities** as well.

## ✓ **BE A BOTTOM-UP PROCESS**

Social innovation needs to be **bottom-up** – even if the initiative comes from above, its design, implementation and monitoring need to be done from the grass root level.

## ✓ **SUPPORT, WITHOUT REPLACING, PUBLIC SERVICES**

Social innovation should complement, and not undermine or replace, universal public service provision, which is the State's responsibility.

*EAPN holds that only under these criteria can innovations be considered as meaningful social innovations, and the EU and national policy frameworks should support initiatives that match this definition.*

# OPPORTUNITIES offered by Social Innovation

EAPN and its members highlight the following opportunities offered by Social Innovation:

1. **Financial support for experimentation and innovation.** Without specific financial means to dedicate efforts to new, risky activities, with relatively low efficiency at least during the initial phase, organisations often do not have resources (time, people, space, means of work, etc.), or willingness (usually risk-avoiding behavior related to changes, or new start-ups in social economy) to innovate. With funds specifically dedicated to experimentation and innovation, NGOs can engage more readily and with better focus with trying new solutions in providing services, starting new activities in the area of social economy, or other. However, there is usually a hefty requirement for very robust evaluation (i.e. randomized control trials), which NGOs have insufficient resources to support.

2. **New relations, new partnerships.** Engaging in social innovation creates opportunities to develop new relationships, partnerships, coalitions at the local level, to bring new resources to the service or practice, and new approaches to the needs satisfaction or economic activity, if social enterprises are at stake. This increases the social capital of all engaged actors, and of the local community in which these partnerships are established. It empowers each of the partners engaged in new relationship, enabling them to also recognize various common interests, and to expand the effects of collaboration beyond the concrete innovation.

3. **Improved services / performance.** Social innovation opens opportunities to improve outreach, particularly in overlooked communities, which have little support from other structures (e.g., expanding home care from urban to rural population areas). It helps address the unmet needs of groups that were not previously supported (e.g., expanding home care to Roma communities, previously excluded from this services), or were supported only partially and inadequately. It helps to satisfy users' needs in more qualitative and appropriate ways (i.e. from home care of elderly to combined home care and daily centres).

4. **New perspectives and frontiers.** Social innovation stimulates creativity, problem-solving, 'thinking outside of the box', offering alternative ways to solve problems and satisfy needs to sometimes rigid, ineffective, and bureaucratic approaches.

5. **Empowerment of NGOs as innovators.** Social innovations improve the visibility and reputation of leading NGOs, giving them a stronger voice and opening doors to having a more significant impact in advocating and promoting broader policy changes. This can stimulate the emergence of new leadership in civil society, as well as new alliances, and bring about new social coalitions in an era lacking 'big social movements'.

6. **Strengthening and empowering EAPN.** Through social innovation, partnerships can be strengthened among members of EAPN, which means that National Networks and European Organisations can be empowered, and cross country alliances and collaborations developed around particular social innovation initiatives, which can add new strength to EAPN at whole.

7. **Raising visibility of actions and issues** that otherwise get overlooked in policy agendas. Innovative practices in the field of poverty reduction and the fostering of social inclusion allow awareness raising and visibility for certain issues that were previously neglected or hidden. A successful, meaningful innovative practice for social inclusion can help start the debate on the broader unmet social need.

# **RISKS and THREATS of Social Innovation**

Social innovation also faces several important **RISKS** in contemporary European societies.

These **risks** appear as major institutional and policy hazards that can endanger the current systems of welfare provision, replacing it with small scale, short-run, and small scope innovative initiatives:

1. The policy focus on social innovation can **undermine the role of the State as universal service provider**. If this is the case, then important social rights can be reduced, and the State absolved of its fundamental responsibility of granting these rights, as said responsibility is transferred to various actors with uncertain obligations.
2. The promotion of social innovation policy can be misused as **justification for austerity cuts**. The burden of cuts to services that have proved to work can be transferred to CSOs who should 'experiment' and find (cheaper) solutions, mostly by engaging vast amount of voluntary work.
3. Although the impetus for diverse actors from third, profit, and public sector to engage in innovation is basically positive, as well as opening markets for new social services and social enterprises, **unmonitored liberalization and privatization of services** can lead to the loss of certain services, and it can threaten their previous quality and affordability.
4. Another danger comes from the possibility that **universal social services become replaced by targeted services**, particularly in the era of austerity policies. The principle to better address specific needs of certain groups can hide the trap of slow abandonment of universal service provision.
5. The social innovation agenda can be used to strengthen the justification for the **shift from core funding for civil society organisations to project funding**. By financing concrete actions defined in terms of experimentation, CSOs' resources are captured in these project-oriented activities, and space for activism, broader perspective and engagement in policy lobbying and social action are severely undermined.
6. In addition to the previous point on funding, CSOs' capacities to act as drivers of social change and promoters of solidarity and social cohesion are undermined strongly by **encouraging competition for scarce funding, instead of promoting cooperation** and complementarity between organisations.



When thinking about engaging with or initiating a social innovation practice, a number of potential **THREATS** need to be kept in mind:

1. **Lack of political or financial support, lack of clear legislative context for social economy.** Even if there is strong innovation potential in the community, this potential will likely be wasted in the absence of adequate political or financial support. This is particularly an issue in communities/societies which are marked by broader lack of political support for a comprehensive welfare state, within which such innovative practices are being promoted, generated and disseminated. The problem is particularly the lack of funding for grass-root NGOs, and the priority given to profit-making companies or governments.

2. **The danger that support to social innovation** can reinforce the dominant paradigm, in which main objective is to achieve higher employment, productivity and growth, instead of introducing new ways of integrating people and satisfying their needs, while treating them with dignity and valuing them as more than mere production units.

3. **Delayed efficiency** can be an obstacle to acceptance of new service or practice. Innovative solutions often do not come with a high level of efficiency. They need to be tested, adjusted, modified, and this requires a certain loss of resources at the initial stages. Therefore, the evaluation of success should be conducted from a longer-term perspective, in order to give a chance to a new practice to deliver results. Contrary to that, project frameworks, or usual evaluation frameworks, are set for short-term, not tolerating such delays in efficiency.



4. **Opposition of vested interests** could represent a strong obstacle to social innovations, particularly in areas where certain services have a well-established history of provision, and some actors have traditional advantages in access to funds or other needed resources.

5. **Old mindsets**, particularly of people who decide on policies and funds, but also of people who are potential users, or service providers. Often, people stick to previous assumptions, values and norms, while innovative solutions require changes in these mindsets.

6. **Poor follow-up** for punctual initiatives, which often raise expectations in vain, leaving users and / or beneficiaries disappointed after the completion of project activities.

7. **Unsuccessful up-scaling**, due to the interference of vested interests, neglect of the specific context, or other reasons, which change the nature of the original service/practice significantly. Lack of involvement of users, detachment from users' needs and interests are also factors that contribute to unsuccessful upscaling.

# **CHECKLIST – Criteria for identifying and Implementing Good Social Innovation Practices**

In order to avoid the risks and threats described, above EAPN proposes list of criteria for good social innovation, in accordance with its definition. The checklist of criteria represents the operationalized definition of social innovation, and therefore it includes same elements, in more detailed and practically defined ways.

These criteria include, in EAPN's view:

**1. Effectively reducing poverty and improving social inclusion.** The innovation practice contributes directly or indirectly to poverty reduction, improvement of wellbeing, exercise of human rights and life in dignity. The impact can be on the individual level, or at the level of the group, community or society.

**2. Types and relativity of novelty.** The innovative practice should introduce some novelty in one or more of the following aspects:

- a. Identification of a new need that was not previously met through services or products.
- b. Provision of a new product or service that satisfies real needs (individual, collective, community, new or old ones).
- c. New methods of doing things (producing, delivering services), which can include new technologies, or new forms of organisation, or new relations.
- d. New actors are involved in innovation initiative, which were previously not engaged.

**3. Empowering users.** A good practice should support and stimulate empowerment while responding to users' needs, rather than providing only passive support. In this sense, a good practice of social innovation should be feature a **bottom-up** approach, it should be guided by complete ownership of the people who initiated it, it should be participatory or at least responsive to users' needs, it should be generated from ideas of CSOs or citizens or, if the practice is introduced 'from above' (by decision of the authorities), it needs to garner bottom-up ownership and support, adjusting to the needs and context of the community.

**4. Strengthening communities.** A meaningful social innovation practice should increase social capital – bring new actors to the scene, build new partnerships, alliances, transform social relations in a way that maximizes the participation of users/beneficiaries.

**5. Empowering CSOs.** A positive innovative practice should raise the reputation and influence of civil society organisations, improve their capacity, create new leaders, enable more power for CSOs to advocate for improved social policies overall.

**6. Sustainability.** Innovative practices should be sustainable, not one-off interventions with no follow-up, or actions with no permanent/long-term changes. Single actions that are finished after trial or after project funding runs out without having brought about durable change can be considered as experimentations, or pilot initiatives, but not innovation. Sustainability also means enduring organisation, which is capable of generating the necessary resources in order to maintain the action over time. In the case of social enterprises, the good practice should demonstrate not only financial sustainability, but also a sustainable business model overall.

**7. Transferability / adaptability.** Good social innovation brings impacts beyond the single case where it was generated. It offers possibilities to be transferred, adjusted to other groups or contexts, and to create greater impact. Some practice should be enduring, by being reproduced in order to become innovation – however, the practice does not have to be reproduced in the same way as at the beginning, it can be transformed, changed in the scale, adapted, but the core novelty should be there.

**8. Accountability.** A good socially innovative practice should be transparent, with a high level of visibility in the community, with appropriate internal and external evaluation, end users' feedback mechanisms, and impact assessment before and after the implementation.

**9. Needs to contribute to positive changes in attitudes, mindsets, and values.** Good practices increase awareness on social problems, on opportunities to improve inclusion, on benefits from increased wellbeing and better integration of vulnerable groups. It brings changes in values, norms, perceptions of others, decreasing the social distance between groups, while fostering solidarity and cohesion.

**10. Complements, but does not replace, universal public services.** Good practices in social innovation need not to substitute themselves to comprehensive and universal State service provision.



# GOOD SOCIAL INNOVATION PRACTICES FROM THE EAPN MEMBERSHIP

## BELGIUM

### 1. Identification information

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### 2. Short description of the practice

CASO: *Centre d'Accueil de Soins et d'Orientations* (« Centre for care and orientation ») is an initiative developed by the organisation « Médecins du Monde ». This (health) care initiative proactively tries to find and support the most vulnerable people, who often have no or difficult access to health and other types of care, amongst which homeless people, undocumented migrants, and others.

The initiative provides a wide range of services, from first aid to support for medical, psychological, social, administrative and other issues. The approach is multidisciplinary and holistic.

### 3. Briefly explain how the described practice satisfies the criteria provided in the Checklist

- The CASO has a direct impact on the wellbeing and inclusion of (extremely) excluded groups, facing multiple, complex obstacles.
- The approach is comprehensive, while also individually tailored and proactive, which is very innovative.
- The cooperation with other service providers (for example, cultural mediation) is another innovative aspect.
- Besides providing services themselves, CASO plays an active advocacy role to achieve sustainable structural changes.
- CASO provides training and organises participative working groups.

### 4. Specify if there was any follow-up

There are now 4 CASOs in Belgium: Brussels, Antwerp, La Louvière, Oostende.

### 5. Any additional information

These Centres provide high-quality services, with a very innovative approach and way of working, which makes them accessible for groups of people who are typically hard to reach, and who are often unable to access care and support. The Centres meet a need that shouldn't exist in the first place, if the Belgian healthcare systems were more accessible and inclusive overall, for all people residing in the country. Accessibility should, in general, be enhanced by getting rid of financial and administrative barriers, as well as psychological and social obstacles. This type of holistic approach and outreach work should be mainstreamed. Read more here: <http://www.medecinsdumonde.be/belgique/3-centres-daccueil-de-soins-et-dorientation>

## 1. Identification information

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## 2. Short description of the practice

*VerkkoNikkarit OSK* (a co-operative) is a project run by Manna ry, an association which has been active for the past 20 years. There were two main objectives: 1) providing needed services, and 2) creating workplaces. Subsequently, the association aimed at creating not only new employment, but also new entrepreneurship and activities in the third sector (social economy) at the local level. It has never contented itself with acting as a mere project organisation, or an actor in the intermediate labour market. The pioneering role can be clearly seen in the "social contract model" implemented in Nastola, as well as in the participation in the research / development work concerning service provision in the Finnish countryside. The co-operative has been classified as a Work Integration Social Enterprise, according to the Finnish legislation.

## 3. Briefly explain how the described practice satisfies the criteria provided in the Checklist

The cooperative was innovative in creating a platform, in which unemployed people with different capabilities could come together to form a member-driven, democratic social enterprise, and where all 20 members managed to get full- or part-time employment. The cooperative connected the needs of the local community who needed different services with the unemployed, who were looking for work. It also functioned as kind of a think-tank, to find more job opportunities for its members. The aim was also change the attitudes in the community, concerning the value of different kinds of meaningful and important work, that the unemployed and people with disabilities people could do. The cooperative both created employment, as well as provided good quality services in rural areas.

## 4. Specify if there was any follow-up

While *VerkkoNikkarit* played a significant role in creating durable change in the community, it was not allowed to reach a stage where it would be fully economically sustainable on its own. The cooperative ceased to work when financial support from the State was withdrawn, due the cuts in the employment budgets. "We have always found a way of surviving, in spite of the deepening economic crisis and all the obstacles. In another kind of social situation, the quantitative results may have been better, but being able to continue (as a social enterprise) can be regarded as a reasonable achievement".

## 5. Any additional information

- ✓ <http://www.verkkonikkarit.fi>
- ✓ [www.manna.fi](http://www.manna.fi)
- ✓ <http://www.tyonraivaaja.com/>

## 1. Identification information

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## 2. Short description of the practice

People who know poverty because they have lived in it are given a chance to leave hardship behind, while, at the same time, use their direct experience to help others. 'Poor for the Poor' project – lead by the Regional Social Welfare Resource Centre Budapest – recognizes that this 'experience of poverty' is similar to professional experience, as a skill, and introduces it in a professional context, i.e., as paid expertise, to develop better measures to reduce poverty. Personal experience of living in poverty is seen as expertise and capitalized as such, to the benefit of the participants and society. The project benefitted from ample media coverage, and a blog was also set up, about the training and experiences of the participants.

## 3. Briefly explain how the described practice satisfies the criteria provided in the Checklist

The novelty consists of viewing the experience of living in poverty as a skill and a tool. This approach is strengthening individuals, by raising the self-esteem of the people involved, but also communities, by providing role models for other people experiencing poverty. The project is based on training and empowering community leaders, enabling people experiencing poverty to stand up for their rights. The training material consisted of a personal part, focusing on the individual life stories of the participants, and it also addressed several crucial areas where people living in poverty can experience disadvantages (such as education, health care, social and citizen rights etc). Besides the personal and the theoretical part, the curriculum was complemented by field visits, which gave participants the opportunity to gain more experience in various institutions (e.g. in schools, family welfare centres, NGOs) and reflect on their learnings through joint discussion and sharing in the training group, while being supported by the facilitators. The project also helped shape the attitudes of those not living in poverty, by raising awareness on a number of issues. The knowledge of people experiencing poverty - who are trained and whose life stories are thought through - can complement the work of social workers and make the supportive processes more effective.

## 4. Specify if there was any follow-up

There were follow-up meetings by the project team focusing on the participants. As a positive externality, a spin-off process took off spontaneously during the second phase of the project: at a grassroots level, people experiencing poverty who participated in the project took steps to get organised on their own and set up peer support systems. Despite all the efforts, since the project had no continuation, this process did not develop later on.

## 5. Any additional information

The project won the 1000 EUR award of SozialMarie (a yearly award for outstanding socially innovative projects) in 2013. See more about it here: <http://sozialmarie.org/winners/2013>. The Hungarian Anti-Poverty Network was a project partner of "Experts by Experience in 3 regions", which started in 2010, and which was the pre-project of Poor for the Poor.

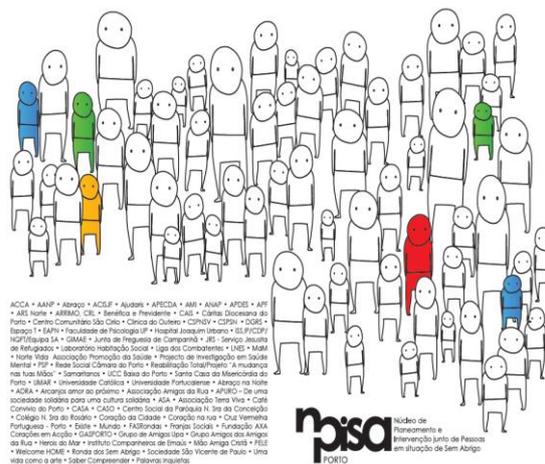
## 1. Identification information

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## 2. Short description of the practice (1-2 paragraphs)

A national Strategy for the Inclusion of Homeless People was implemented in 2009. The organisation of NPISAs - *Planning and Intervention Group for Homeless People / Núcleo Planeamento e Intervenção para pessoas em situação de Sem-Abrigo* – responds to the need for mobilizing a set of



partners at local level, in order to promote an integrated approach on the ground. NPISA Porto is composed several non-profit and public organisations (a total of 64 entities) and also homeless people themselves. It promotes a clear debate among all these actors about the needs of homeless people, but also the needs of the organisations that work with them. The idea is to identify and respond to these needs, promote networking, empower homeless people, avoid duplication and overlapping of resources. One of the principles of this Strategy, which is also one of the innovations that set it apart from other experiences in Europe, is the existence of a team case manager, who follows the person through all steps of the process (individualized approach) and guarantees further follow up for 3 years.

## 3. Briefly explain how the described practice satisfies the criteria provided in the Checklist

The work of NPISA has contributed to ensuring better intervention on homelessness and better social inclusion for those experiencing it. NPISA Porto has identified 2500 homeless people, out of which 900 are being assisted, and 22 were already included in the labour market (through the project *Plataforma + Emprego – Platform Employment Plus*). Empowerment is also key: since the very beginning, the group involved homeless people themselves. In time, and with aim of promoting inclusion through art, the group *As Vozes do Silêncio – Voices of Silence* was created, which has enabled the effective participation of homeless people through seminars, movies, etc, alongside the general public and other stakeholders. The independent movement *Uma vida como a Arte – A Life as Art* was also created in the framework of this initiative in 2013. Through NPISA, it was also possible to bring together all the volunteer groups working in the city with the homeless, and organise their work. The wide variety of partners involved is a key feature. The methodology is based on networking between public and private actors, so it is not a replacement for public services.

## 4. Specify if there was any follow-up

NPISA Porto will continue its work, since it contributed to the development of other structures and projects that are being implemented in the area, with the aim to promote better social inclusion of homeless people.

## 5. Any additional information

- ✓ **Plataforma + Emprego:** <http://www.plataformamaisemprego.pt>
- ✓ **As Vozes do Silêncio:** <https://www.facebook.com/asvozesdosilencio/timeline>
- ✓ **Uma Vida como a Arte (A Life as Art):**  
<http://umavidacomoaarte.wix.com/umavidacomoaarte>;  
[https://www.facebook.com/umavidacomoaarte/info/?tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/umavidacomoaarte/info/?tab=page_info)



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For more information on EAPN general publications and activities, see [www.eapn.eu](http://www.eapn.eu)

**The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is an independent network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union, established in 1990.**



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