

BUILDING SOCIAL EUROPE

EAPN International Conference - Dublin, 19 February 2010

Conference Report

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in the EU2020 Agenda (panel debate)

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Executive Summary / Key Messages

The following key messages were highlighted:

The European Union is at a turning point. The instability caused by the current crisis, including the long-term threat of cuts to our public services and social protection systems, is confirming ordinary people's distrust in the EU as a Union which continues to act in the interests of the market with a growth-first model, rather than giving priority to building a fairer, more cohesive society which can deliver prosperity for all.

The failure of the European Union to deliver on its commitments in 2000 “to make a decisive impact on the eradication on poverty”, even during a period of high economic and employment growth, with an increase in the number of people living at risk of poverty rising from 16 to 17% from 2000 to 2008 (85 million people), matched with increasing inequality, further confirms the need for a stronger social and anti-poverty pillar in the future EU strategy (Europe 2020).

The crisis raises severe challenges for the EU, but also provides an opportunity to shape a new vision for the EU and its role in the world. This new vision needs to give priority to tackling poverty and social exclusion both within and outside the EU, challenge the assumptions of ever-increasing growth and invest in a more social and sustainable model which puts the economy at the service of people and the planet and aims to deliver on global equity. Real progress also depends on concerted measures to reduce inequalities between people and regions – of income and wealth, but also access to resources, services and decision-making, recognizing that more equal societies do better for everybody.

2010, the EU Year for combating poverty and social exclusion must be seized as a key opportunity. The many national activities being carried out by EAPN and other actors across the EU are vital to raise awareness about the reality of poverty, its causes and consequences, but this must also lead to an effective political legacy – a renewed political commitment and strategy at EU and national level, to tackle poverty and social exclusion, embed participation and promote a better life for all.

Such a legacy depends on getting the Europe 2020 strategy right. In EAPN's view this means – getting the strategy, the instruments and the policies right as well as the funding and governance structures. Getting the strategy right means identifying poverty, social exclusion and inequalities as key challenges. The instruments must include a high level declaration by Heads of State, a new instrument to measure progress beyond GDP and a strengthened Social Open Method of Coordination, with poverty targets and better governance. The policy priorities must focus on ensuring access to rights, resources and services including implementing Active Inclusion, making progress towards a framework directive to ensure an adequate minimum income, and to guarantee access to affordable, quality services including social services – such as health, housing and education through a framework directive.

The commitments on child poverty and homelessness must also be followed up, as well as mainstreaming equality and discrimination in anti-poverty policies. Better governance is vital, with civil society and people in poverty made partners in the national and EU decision-making process. On funding, a new poverty programme, as well as targeted use of Structural funds for social inclusion, is needed which can support capacity building and participation of NGOs and people in poverty, but also the development of grass-roots demonstration projects to support new approaches to fight poverty at local and regional levels.

The Europe 2020 proposals made by the Commission were broadly welcomed by the conference, particularly the proposal of including an EU poverty target – for 25% reduction in the at-risk of poverty level (60% median income) as one of the 5 priority EU targets, establishing a specific poverty and social inclusion guideline and a new EU Flagship Platform against poverty and social exclusion based on the Social OMC, with financing from Structural Funds. However, the conference was concerned about how far growth and jobs would remain the main paradigm, with assumptions that any job provided the best way out of poverty, despite the growing levels of in-work poverty. It underlined the need to emphasize fundamental, social and economic rights and to ensure that social inclusion and action against discrimination was mainstreamed as an objective across the whole strategy – particularly in relation to macro and micro-economic policy and the need to defend social protection systems and public services.

The development of new EU instruments were strongly supported to defend and guarantee key social rights and establish social standards, particularly access to minimum income and services, (framework directives) and decent work as part of integrated Active Inclusion approaches, as well as an endorsement of the anti-discrimination directive with positive duties.

Increased civil dialogue was seen as key to building ownership of Europe 2020 and increasing credibility of the EU, but only if it moves beyond ‘consultation’ to partnership approaches to ensure better anti-poverty policies and implementation. The governance mechanisms of the Social OMC are a vital good practice, but need to be strengthened and driven by active national stakeholder partnership in National Action Plans, including NGOs and people in poverty. Targeted use of Structural Funds and PROGRESS to support these mechanisms will be vital.

Workshop 1

Achieving an adequate income for all and a reduction in inequalities.

Workshop 2

Right to affordable, quality services.

Workshop 3

Measures to support people into decent jobs.

Workshop 4

Fighting Poverty by combating discrimination and promoting diversity.

Workshop 5

Gender in the fight against Poverty.

Workshop 1

Achieving an adequate income for all and a reduction in inequalities.

Proposals:

There is a need for greater cooperation to develop EU Social Standards. A Directive on Adequate Minimum Income should be a first step in this direction. However this will need to be implemented through local action.

Changing perceptions – use evidence and embed participative standard budget methodologies across the EU for calculating and upgrading a standard for a decent life.

Build solidarity – between workers and the unemployed, link living wage campaigns to adequate income and universal services to benefit all.

Workshop 2

Right to affordable, quality services.

Proposals:

Build an **agreed, broad** and **evolving** definition of public services.

Set up EU legislation that guarantees the rights to universal services within a quality standard framework which meets the needs of all users regardless of their citizenship.

An EU and national structure linked to a strengthened OMC to ensure implementation and monitoring impact of the EU legislation including a special unit within DG market which allows users to participate in the design and implementation of services and evaluation of their impact.

Workshop 3

Measures to support people into decent jobs.

Proposals:

Make the implementation of the **Active Inclusion principles** an overarching framework for the targeted use of Structural Funds.

Reshape the National Reform Programmes so that they include real National Employment Strategies, with quantified targets for sustainable job creation, inclusive labour markets, and quality jobs.

Support an integrated quality of life approach – giving equal weight to support for accessing decent employment and the right to private life and care.

Workshop 4

Fighting Poverty by combating discrimination and promoting diversity.

Underpinned by principles of participation at all levels and an analysis of structural versus an individual nature of problems/issues faced. Proposals:

Legislation: EU horizontal directive with positive duties, further focus on social economic rights.

Policy making: single template for discrimination and poverty proofing post Lisbon e.g. OMC, EU 2020, Stockholm programme, Roma & Traveler initiatives and also accession to ECHR.

Implementation: targeted resources by governments and the EU, in conjunction with resources for NGOs.

Workshop 5

Gender in the fight against Poverty.

Proposals:

Equal participation of men and women in decision making will assist in more balanced policy making.

Combating violence is enshrined in both the European Charter for Human Rights and the European Treaty and in that context violence should be taken more seriously as a policy issue in the EU.

EU Directives on minimum income and **access to universal quality affordable services** could improve the situation of women in poverty.

1. Introduction

The European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) organised an international conference in Dublin to further its vision for the legacy of the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, in the context of the EU's priorities for the next decade. The objective of this conference was to present concrete proposals for building a social Europe with the capacity to end poverty and social exclusion, and make a real difference to the 85 million Europeans who live everyday at risk of poverty.

The conference set out to:

1. Take stock of the European Union's contribution to ending poverty and social exclusion.
2. Take forward EAPN's proposals for improving the social dimension of the EU 2020 strategy.
3. Provide an opportunity for a range of stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty, to input on how the legacy of the Year should be realised.

EAPN's proposals on the EU 2020 strategy: [An EU We Can Trust](#) formed a background to this debate.

Opening the conference, **Minister Mary Hanafin**, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs stated that bringing about an end to poverty and building a society for all are the goals that countries right across the European Union have decided will be the focus of national attention for the year. A video input presented to the conference gave voice to people experiencing poverty. Five contributors shared their views on the impact of the EU on poverty, the actions the EU must take and hopes for the EU in 2020.

The report comprises five sections. Following the introduction, **section two** included a summary of inputs by the panel of speakers which included Minister Mary Hanafin; Marie Donnelly for the European Commission and Fintan Farrell of EAPN. The first session was chaired by Philip O'Connor, EAPN Ireland Chairperson.

Section three presents a summary of the five workshop discussions. The objective of the workshops was to explore how to take forward concrete proposals on key areas of EU policy vital for social progress, as part of a legacy for 2010, drawing on EAPN's post 2010 agenda. Workshops explored national and EU perspectives on key priorities and generated concrete proposals for discussion during the afternoon plenary session. A brief synopsis is also included of lunchtime discussions on economics, democracy, human rights, trade unions, international development and the environment.

The plenary session debate, which was chaired by Hugh Frazer, Adjunct Professor at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, is recorded in **section four**. Inputs were provided by Jerome Vignon, former Director DG employment and Michel Dolle, Research Centre on Income, Costs and Social Cohesion. **Section five** provides an overview of the final panel debate. The panel debate was chaired by Professor Brigid Laffan, Principal of UCD College of Human Sciences. Prof. Laffan introduced Tony de Koster who gave an input on the EU2020 agenda, responding also to inputs from earlier in the day. Following his input and questions, proposals were made to the conference on the five workshop themes. The panel of speakers were invited to respond to the proposals.

Panel speakers included [Mary Doyle](#), Department of An Taoiseach, Ireland; [Proinsias de Rossa](#), MEP; [Tonnie De Koster](#), Secretariat General, European Commission; [Ludo Horemans](#), President EAPN Europe; and [Jozef Niemiec](#), Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

2. Building Social Europe - from Crisis to Opportunity

Morning Session - Summary of Inputs

Anna Visser EAPN Ireland, Introduction

Welcoming the Minister and delegates from across the European Union, Anna Visser, Director EAPN Ireland set out the context and purpose for the International Conference.

Anna Visser stated that the conference meets in the context of unparalleled public cynicism towards politics and public life. As we emerge from a socially and economically turbulent decade, it is understandable that many people look towards national and European politics with a sense of scepticism and detachment. An economic model that provided so much certainty has fallen apart, suddenly and brutally demonstrating the vagaries of the market in everyday lives. As the global recession deepened, people looked to politicians, to decision makers and to institutions like the European Union for reassurance and for a vision of how we might emerge from the economic crisis. The response was unfortunately far from encouraging; 'more of the same' instead of 'change', 'sharing the pain' rather than 'hope for the future'.

Despite that response, it is becoming clearer that the 500 million men women and children who live in the European Union are unwilling to return to the past and unwilling to accept the illusion that the market will see us through. All over Europe, people are coming together to say that they don't want a return to the obsessive focus on growth, or to the economics of boom and bust. Grassroots movements are organising and demanding innovative and sustainable solutions to the crisis; solutions like a Robin Hood tax on speculative banking, a High Pay Commission to tackle inequality, and a right to minimum income to raise millions above the poverty line.

According to the European Commission Social Report for 2009, while many Europeans express general personal satisfaction with life, Europe is scoring poorly with its citizens on more specific social indicators including job satisfaction, cost of living, confidence in public administration, and social protection including unemployment benefit. Europeans are far from satisfied with social progress. In particular there is strong dissatisfaction with the way inequality and poverty is being addressed, the prevailing sentiment is that the situation has deteriorated in the last five years and is set to get worse.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the European Union is out of sync with its citizens and is in serious danger of losing the battle for hearts and minds. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In 2000 the Lisbon Strategy adopted a target of making a decisive impact on poverty by 2010, the strategy was re-launched in 2005, and growth and jobs objectives were prioritised. So how far have we travelled in the last ten years? In 2000 **16% of the EU population lived at risk of poverty**, in 2008 (before the economic crisis) this rate was **17%, or nearly 85 million people**. With the increasing population, in the EU 27 this represents a real increase of nearly 8 million people. If you fill Croke Park, then fill it one hundred times again, that is what the increase in poverty looks like in real terms. Not exactly a 'decisive impact'. In the meantime income inequality in the EU has remained stubbornly immovable.

In 2000 in the EU25 the top 20% of the population were 4.5 times wealthier than the bottom 20%, this increased to 4.8 times in 2008.

Poverty is not inevitable - it results from political choices and policy action and inaction. In Ireland the at risk of poverty rate fell from **21% in 2001 to 14.4% in 2008** (though for many groups this rate is considerably higher). Significantly, consistent poverty has been reduced to 4.2%, which means that the Irish Government is now within touching distance of its stated objective of reducing consistent poverty to between 2 and 4% by 2012 and eliminating it entirely by 2016. While this progress may be interrupted by recent events, it remains very significant. The objective to end poverty should be the hallmark of any civilised and progressive union of states; all the more so because it is entirely achievable.

We will spend many years examining the lessons of the past, but 2010 is a chance to set out a powerful and progressive vision for the future. 2010 is an opportunity for the European Union to reassert itself as a progressive force for social and economic change, it is time to accept that the Growth and Jobs Strategy has not delivered for the 85 million Europeans who live at risk of poverty, nor has it served the broader population who continue to live in societies characterised by inequality.

Now is the time for member states to rise to the challenge and emerge from this shared crisis with a renewed mandate from their citizens and a roadmap to rebuild the European social and economic model.

Video input voices of people experiencing poverty

A video input presented to the conference gave voice to people experiencing poverty. Five contributors shared their views on the impact of the EU on poverty; views on actions the EU must take and hopes for the EU in 2020.

There were different perspectives on the impact of the EU on poverty from one contributor stating that with 80 million people living in poverty - a figure that is not coming down - the EU has not done much. Another contributor felt that through the EU there has been greater participation, with people experiencing poverty participating in European anti-poverty networks. This process has highlighted that people across the EU face the same problems. While one speaker considered that the EU has positively impacted on lifting some women out of the poverty trap – given that prior to entering the EU, a “marriage bar” was in place limiting the employment of women who were married – another speaker felt that the EU has achieved little for people with disabilities.

In terms of actions the EU should take, those identified included ensuring a high standard of health care (including hospital care) and ensuring more public awareness not only of poverty but the social exclusion that comes with it.

Contributors hoped that people experiencing poverty would have the opportunity to input into decisions; hoped that there will be opportunities to lobby decision makers; hoped that the European Year is not going to be just a talking shop, that it will be effective; that at the end of 2019 the EU shall announce that poverty has been eradicated going into 2020; hoped that by 2020 each citizen will be able to take full part in all human life, that poverty should not be a barrier to anybody.

Philip O'Connor Chair

The opening plenary was chaired by Philip O'Connor, Chairperson EAPN Ireland. Philip O'Connor welcomed Minister Mary Hanafin, TD and the speakers, Marie Donnelly, European Commission and Fintan Farrell, EAPN.

The Chair reflected that 2010, the EU Year on Poverty and Social Exclusion represents a major turning point in terms of where the European Union is at. The movement of chairs, he said, is almost audible from Brussels. The question is being asked, what direction and what shape the EU is going to take over the next few years. He referred to what he described as unsettling statements that have come from the European Commission in response to the current economic crisis. There is an over reliance on competitiveness as the "cure all" and the solution to the future of growth in Europe.

Commenting on the Europe of 1990s, he described the sustained attack on social European values and the social market over the past six to seven years. Ireland embraced the idea of a social Europe when it was the agenda. All these things are now looking threatened and there is a sense of conflict in the air. There is no doubt that great strides have been made over the past decade and he recognised the achievements of government to fight the gap and also the strides made in the area of child poverty.

Policy needs to ensure that this progress is not threatened and he highlighted the dramatic change in unemployment rate which has risen from 4% and 13%. In the media, the recession had hardly started when we heard extreme economic perspectives and rhetoric on incentivising people to get back to work. Such rhetoric is a major insult; he hopes that Government is not going to take such advice and looks forward to hearing commitments at a European level to a social Europe. The future of the EU shall be shaped by decisions made this year; he hopes that this can be in a progressive direction.

Philip O'Connor concluded by welcoming the Minister, Mary Hanafin TD and inviting her to address the conference.

Minister Mary Hanafin Ireland, Opening Address

Opening the conference, Minister Mary Hanafin, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs stated that bringing about an end to poverty and building a society for all are the goals that countries right across the European Union have decided will be the focus of national attention for the year.

Minister Hanafin said the European Anti-Poverty Network has for over 20 years sought to ensure that the fight against poverty and social exclusion is high on the agenda of the European Union. The designation of 2010 as European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion provides us with the opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved, to learn the lessons from the past and to lay the foundations for the type of society that we all aspire to have - a society in which every individual feels valued and has the resources to participate in the activities that are regarded as the norm – a society for all.

Building an inclusive society is at the heart of the Irish Government's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The goal of that plan is to progressively reduce the numbers of people experiencing consistent poverty and to eliminate consistent poverty by 2016. She considered that significant progress has been made in recent years.

The rate of consistent poverty in the population is now 4.2%.

The rate has been halved since 2003 when it was 8%. In effect this means that over that period 133,000 people were lifted out of consistent poverty.

The Minister went on to say the **“immediate challenge is to maintain the progress made in recent years and to protect those who are most vulnerable in the economic downturn”**. She said that the Government is determined to achieve the elimination of poverty and to restore economic growth. She argued that providing high levels of employment is the first essential step in achieving that aim.

Working to restore the economic growth we have benefited from over the past decade is now, therefore, the overriding priority for achieving the goals and targets of the Government’s National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in the years ahead. The Minister explained that major adjustments have been needed to get the public finances back on track and to lay the foundations for bringing employment back where it was before the economic downturn. While making very difficult decisions, in the current tough budgetary environment, the Government was determined to do its utmost to protect the most vulnerable people in Irish society. This included the intention that those over 66 as well as children in welfare dependent and low income families were to be protected from reductions.

Right across schemes and programmes, she argued, the Government sought to ensure that as far as possible there would be no rowing back on the very real improvements and gains made in recent years for some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Turning to the aims and objectives of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, Minister Hanafin said it affirms the importance of collective effort and engagement of all interests – Government, local authorities, voluntary and community groups, employers, workers, farmers and people experiencing poverty – in the fight against social exclusion.

Minister Hanafin concluded by saying the EU Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion is an opportunity to promote the importance of an EU wide consensus on the elimination of poverty across all member states as a key purpose of the new strategy for 2020 to make the EU a smarter, greener social market economy. She reflected that the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty & Social Exclusion presents a major opportunity to engage with all interests as part of an EU wide debate on how we can build on what has been achieved and to set priorities for the future. **This conference aims to present concrete proposals for building a social Europe with the capacity to end poverty and social exclusion.**

Marie Donnelly European Commission

Congratulating EAPN on the timing of the conference, Marie Donnelly, stated that the conference fitted ideally within the context of the European Year on Poverty and Social Exclusion. This is the kind of event that will take place throughout Europe over the coming months in 29 European countries including Iceland and Norway.

Such initiatives provide a forum and raise awareness that a shared and collective responsibility to combat poverty is necessary. We cannot talk about solving poverty if we do not involve people suffering poverty. We need the understanding of what poverty means in life and what it does not involve. Without involvement of those experiencing poverty, she argued, we cannot find an adequate solution.

There is a crisis worldwide. This is a time where questions are asked. Marie Donnelly argued that it is fair to say that the European social model has kicked in. She asked however: is it effective?; is it enough?; can it be better? There is a social security structure which is inherent to the model and increased expenditure in a number of areas.

With regard to increased expenditure, one of the areas highlighted was in relation to financial instruments. The structure of the Globalisation Fund has completely changed; for example a new instrument has just been agreed in relation to micro finance. She explained that this is a facility and notion used outside of Europe but not really applied within Europe. The facility injects finance, aiming to support people who are disadvantaged so that they can choose to go into self employment and be supported in that enterprise. There has in fact been a substantial demand for the Fund, including from Irish based companies such as Dell and Waterford Glass.

Marie Donnelly argued that there is a realisation that the crisis has broken the model in Europe. She said that we should never and shall never go back to a pre-crisis Europe. There is an opportunity to go forward in an entirely different direction and this is what people want; this is the challenge.

Marie Donnelly brought news regarding “Europe 2020”, pointing to the fact that the title itself highlights the European strategy for smart, green and inclusive growth. She argued that this reflects a move away from competitiveness and a clear recognition that in the EU we have a society and not merely an economy. There is however a social pillar which addresses employment, the need for which is clear. We need new skills in Europe. This applies to both young people entering the labour market as well as those coming to the end of their working life. They need the opportunity to renew their skills.

The third pillar includes the fight against poverty. A significant component that is being proposed is the setting of a target for a percentage reduction in poverty across the EU. She acknowledged that the question of a target and the exact figure to be applied is one that will involve difficult and significant negotiation before it would be included in a final Strategy. The starting point that has been set by the Commission is that governments should achieve a 25% reduction between 2010 and 2020. The hope is that this target will survive through the next stages of national debate; allowing for an increase but arguing against a decrease.

It is one thing for a target to be agreed upon at a European level, however, she argued that a target becomes useless if not translated and transposed at the member state level. A target really only serves as a flag ship to the member states, who are then required in the light of their own situation to make this target a reality. The Commission has proposed the adoption by member states of a process whereby they plan both what they are going to achieve and by when.

This is a difficult process; it is not a given that a target will be accepted. She highlighted that although the European Commission has availed of this method at present the inclusion of a target in the final “EU 2020” draft is not a given. Marie Donnelly signalled that this is a very sensitive issue in the political process. Not all member states want to shine light on poverty right now as it is difficult to cope in the current crisis.

As an optimist, Marie Donnelly believes that a target for the reduction in poverty will be adopted. In order to ensure that this target would be achieved, she highlighted the need to benchmark. This process is important both to mark success but also to understand how others are performing and to learn from one another. She emphasised that benchmarking is not a ‘name and shame’ exercise but a tool to support.

A woman with short dark hair is speaking at a podium. She is wearing a dark jacket. The background is a blue wall with some faint, illegible text. The entire image has a blue tint. Overlaid on the image is white text in a bold, sans-serif font.

“We need new skills in Europe. This applies to both young people entering the labour market as well as those coming to the end of their working life.

They need the opportunity to renew their skills.”

Challenges in Europe include the need to modernise our social protection system. We have to be smart about how we achieve this as the future of Europe depends upon its success. When integrating social aims into all the initiatives that we launch, we are aware that we have to carry out impact assessments. Heretofore, the impact assessment has been largely economic and thus needs to be altered to incorporate a social element. We need to develop tools and techniques for this; we need to go further. This is not automatic and Marie Donnelly argued that while we need to be more expert, the process of developing the necessary tools for social impact assessments has already begun and progress made.

As a final comment, and reflecting on the voices and views expressed in the earlier video input presented to the conference, she opined that the EU needs to assess if we are being effective in our communication. The indication from comments in the video makes one ask; is it that we are not doing anything or that we are not communicating it? Clearly there is a challenge as the message that we are supporting people experiencing poverty and that we will continue to support them is not being understood.

Fintan Farrell EAPN

The focus of the input by Fintan Farrell, EAPN Director, was on a political legacy from 2010. In setting the context, he outlined the origins and membership of EAPN. EAPN is a membership organisation of 26 national networks and 23 European organisations which was established originally in 1990 as a network of independent NGOs involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, to defend the interests of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the development of EU policies and programmes.

Some of the key achievements since that time have been in building a participative and sustainable network and in its impact on EU policy. It is a growing network with increasing participation of people in poverty and has seen networks secure increased funding. The impact on EU policy is evident through for example, new articles in EU Treaties, the EU Social Inclusion Strategy, the EU Programme to support the strategy (PROGRESS), the EU Recommendation on Active inclusion and in a partnership principle in Structural Funds. Other important examples include EU Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty and securing 2010 as the EU Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Fintan Farrell stressed the need to take the opportunities that present themselves in a dedicated EU Year, to get involved and to support joint initiatives of the 2010 NGO Coalition as well as joining in the official events and events of other NGOs and actors. The year presents opportunities to build awareness of the causes of poverty and exclusion and the policies needed for inclusion and the eradication of poverty. He pointed to the need to speak not only of poverty but also of wealth. “Speaking about combating poverty without speaking about wealth and redistribution is like offering to host the Winter Olympics without having access to snow”. Ultimately we need to lobby for a political legacy from the EU Year.

Reflecting on the past ten years, he said that there has been no significant progress on poverty and social exclusion. The ‘growth and jobs’ approach has not reduced poverty and has actually contributed to widening the inequality gap. He argued that real progress depends on a new, renewed awareness of the need to address inequalities including of income and wealth; access to resources, services and decision making.

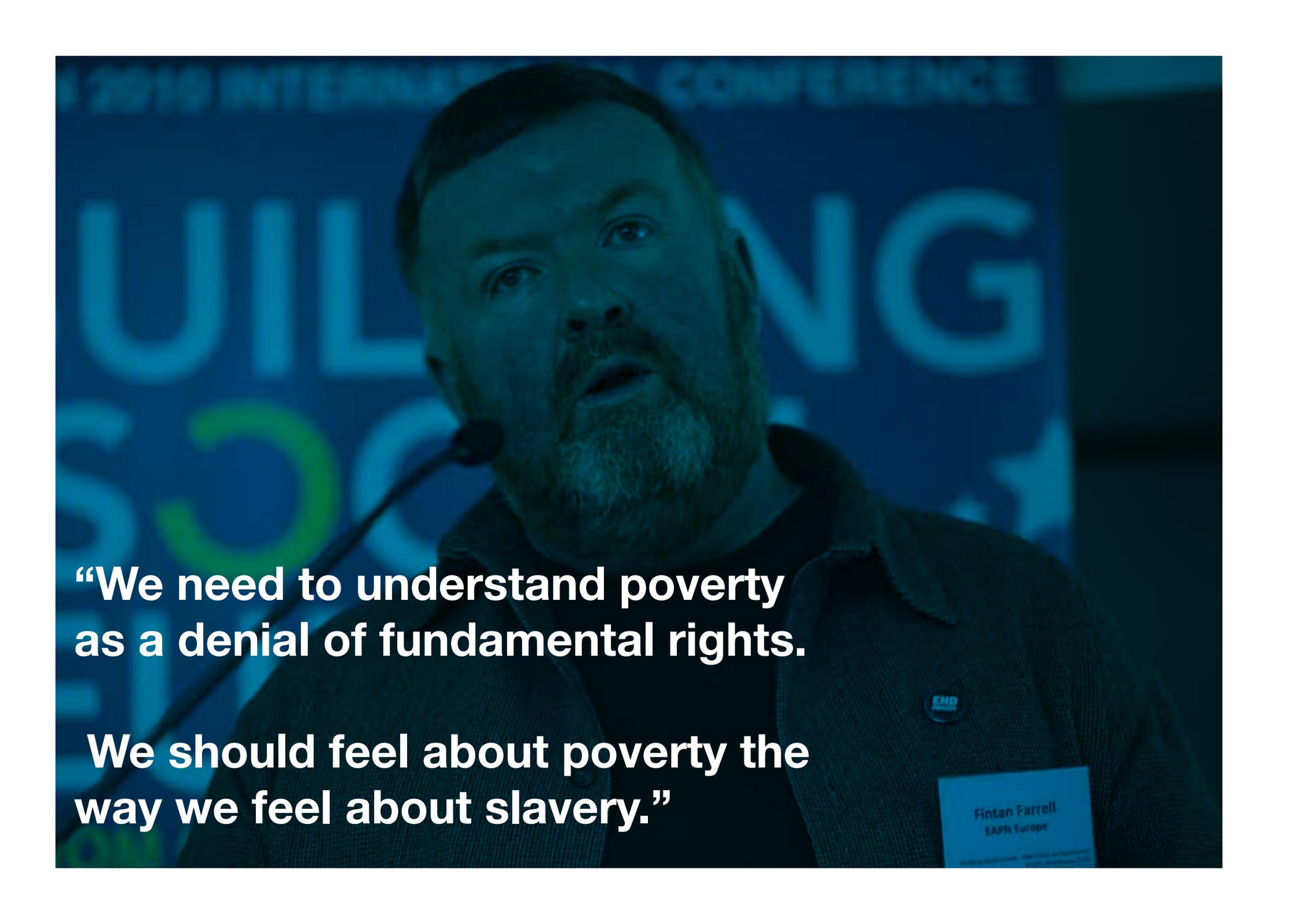
What awareness then is needed to make progress in the fight against poverty? Fintan set out key points regarding awareness stating that poverty must be understood as a denial of fundamental rights.

“An economy should be at the service of people and public interest, guaranteeing an adequate income and achieving a fairer distribution of wealth.”

More equal societies are better for everyone; growth without fair distribution will not deliver on poverty. Poverty cannot be solved by social policies alone - employment not the only solution – but requires the mobilisation of all policies. Universal services and targeted measures offer solutions. A well functioning democracy (representative and participative) and solidarity across the globe are critical; the fight against poverty outside and inside Europe is part of the same fight.

Key to achieving a Political Legacy from 2010 is getting the EU2020 strategy right, getting the instruments right, getting the policies right and getting the funding right. Getting the strategy right requires identifying poverty, social exclusion and inequalities as important challenges to be addressed in the EU2020 strategy; identifying redistribution of wealth as key and ensuring participation and ownership of the EU2020 strategy . In order to secure the right instruments, there needs to be a high level declaration from Heads of State and Governments. We need to go beyond GDP to measure progress. A tougher Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC) should be re-launched, including poverty targets and better governance.

With regard to policy, Fintan Farrell highlighted the importance of implementing the Active Inclusion Recommendation and moving forward on a framework directive on Adequate Minimum Income schemes. An EU Framework Directive to guarantee accessible and affordable quality services is required. The trend towards working poor needs to be reversed rather than punishing people excluded from the labour market. He highlighted the need to follow up commitments made in the thematic year on child poverty and the year on homelessness as well as the importance of mainstreaming equality and anti discrimination in anti poverty policies.

A photograph of Fintan Farrell speaking at a conference. He is a man with a beard, wearing a dark sweater, and is speaking into a microphone. The background is a blue wall with large white text that reads "WILLING". There is also a small "END" logo on his sweater and a name tag that says "Fintan Farrell EAPH Europe".

“We need to understand poverty as a denial of fundamental rights.

We should feel about poverty the way we feel about slavery.”

On funding, he recommended both a new EU Poverty Programme (Progress+) which includes support for capacity building of anti poverty NGOs and demonstration projects in the fight against poverty as well as the use of Structural Funds for inclusion, and being accessible to anti poverty NGOs.

There is a small margin for hope, he suggested. 'European Platform against Poverty' has been identified as one of nine possible EU flagships in the proposals from President Barroso for the EU2020 Agenda. This would allow current and new initiatives and mutual learning to continue and develop; however, it is problematic as he argued it is constructed within the old failed paradigm of Jobs and Growth.

In concluding the input on the question of a 'new' vision for the EU, Fintan Farrell quoted Jean Monnet who in the throws of World War II, had argued for "an organisation of the world that will allow all resources to be exploited as well as possible and to be distributed as evenly as possible among persons, so as to create peace and happiness throughout the entire world". This vision has not been achieved, it is relevant today and has been recognised for some time now.

3. Workshop Discussions

Introduction

The objective of the workshops was to explore how to take forward concrete proposals on key areas of EU policy vital for social progress, as part of a legacy for 2010, drawing on EAPN's post 2010 agenda. Workshops explored national and EU perspectives on key priorities and generated concrete proposals for discussion during the afternoon plenary session.

This section of the report sets out the context and purpose of each workshop. It presents a summary of the discussions which contributed to the proposal made to the conference and the proposals themselves.

Workshop 1

Achieving an adequate income for all and a reduction in inequalities

Chair: [Mary Murphy](#), National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Irish perspective: [Bernadette McMahon](#), Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice

Bulgarian & EU perspective: [Maria Jeliazkova](#), Vice Chair, EAPN Social Inclusion Working Group

Context: Providing an adequate income for all is essential to prevent and reduce poverty. It is also a key right in the new Charter of Fundamental Rights. The workshop explored how far progress is being made on implementing effective minimum income and redistributive policies at national and EU level, and make recommendations for progress, building on EAPN proposals.

Workshop 1

Achieving an adequate income for all and a reduction in inequalities

Key discussion points:

The difficulty of establishing standards across the EU, with such big differences. Any EU legal framework would have to set common definitions, principles and methodology but let the national level develop their own specific adequate levels.

The link to empowerment, participation and power – the right to have a say in the decisions that affect our lives. People on minimum income want the same.

How much consensus is there in relation to the need to redistribute? There is no agreement at EU level on this but there is an opportunity to have this debate.

Changing perceptions and challenging attitudes: There is a perception that people who are on benefits or unemployed receive an adequate payment when the reality is otherwise – this is a key political challenge. Changing public attitudes is a challenge.

Active Inclusion as a concept has been underused and needs to become more prominent – through awareness raising as well as better monitoring from EU and national level. The Social OMC has a key role in this.

Challenging the current paradigm: We have to face realities that there has been a big movement to the right, and the powerful and rich resist change. We need tax to pay for redistribution.

If we are talking about a minimum income, why not a maximum income? There has never been a better time to have this discussion.

Workshop 1

Achieving an adequate income for all and a reduction in inequalities

Financing Social Protection/Minimum Income and Pensions:

We need to challenge the question of financing and look at both sides of public budget management – where does the money come from? In the last 20 years there has been a big shift from taxing capital to taxing labour. More tax income needs to be raised from the banks repaying loans and by tackling tax evasion and avoidance. The minimum income level must be at least at poverty threshold but should be linked to real needs – the standard budget methodology is essential for this.

There should also be a target on income and wealth gap.

EU debate about harmonizing tax levels. One of the arguments used for not limiting income has been that otherwise the “rich” will move to other countries. These tools need to cover speculation, capital mobility and the use of information technology. We need to make a clearer link to alternative taxation proposals.

Cannot separate the debate on income from universal services. For example, the Nordic model worked precisely because it provided universal services for everybody, with an adequate minimum income.

More focus on the main causes of poverty traps. Income must make a reasonable standard of living possible. Every human being has the right to a life with dignity.

Workshop 2

Right to affordable, quality services

Chair: [Katarina Klamkova](#), EAPN Czech Republic

Irish perspective: [Ann Irwin](#), Community Workers' Cooperative

French & EU perspective: [Michel Mercadié](#), EAPN/FEANTSA France and Chair of Social Platform Working Group on Services

Context: The right to affordable public services, or Services of General Interest (SGI) (particularly social services like housing, health and education but also access to transport, energy, etc) is a key right guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and through the EU social model. The workshop explored current developments on affordable access to key services at national level, highlighting the obstacles and ways forward, and the EU's role in guaranteeing affordable access, building on EAPN proposals.

Workshop 2

Right to affordable, quality services

Key discussion points:

Ideology of a market-oriented approach which underpins the EU approach should be challenged.

There is a need for a broader definition of public services. Social impact assessment of the privatisation and liberalisation of public services needs in the framework of a strengthened OMC is necessary to help bridge the gap between policy making and implementation.

Need for a Framework Directive on services of general interest and sectoral directives on social and health services.

If we are serious about lifting people out of poverty and social exclusion, access to universal services that meet their needs is essential and they need to be provided as a right. Involvement of users in design, implementation, and assessment of the impact on the delivery of services is crucial to success and quality of outcomes.

Discussion on access to public services needs to consider the situation of particular groups including Travelers, asylum seekers and people isolated in rural areas.

Access to services should not be based on citizenship but on residence. Discrimination in service delivery also needs to be tackled.

Workshop 2

Right to affordable, quality services

Public funding should be strengthened to guarantee the provision of public services by member states. The right to services is not theoretical. Legal actions have been initiated in some member states. It is now possible to launch complaints at the EU level.

Strengthen the social OMC. Currently it can be quite invisible and needs an effective monitoring mechanism. Development of a specific unit in DG Market on SGIs.

Principles that need to be kept in mind include quality of access; quality of experience of using public services; equality in terms of outcomes and accessibility of public services for all.

Workshop 3

Measures to support people into decent jobs

Chair: [Claudia Taylor East](#), EAPN Malta and Chair of the EAPN Structural Funds Working Group

Irish perspective: [Brid O' Brien](#), Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed

French & EU perspective: [Judith Puehringer](#), EAPN Austria and EAPN Second Vice Chair Employment Working Group

Context: The loss of jobs is one of the most recognised costs of the crisis. The workshop evaluated national approaches to supporting people into quality jobs, including use of Structural Funds in the context of the current crisis and beyond, and make proposals at the national and EU level building on EAPN proposals.

Workshop 3

Measures to support people into decent jobs

Key discussion points:

The balance between quality and non-quality work is changing, also under pressure of globalisation and cuts. Conditionality is increasing everywhere and this is increasing short-term employment. Long-term, it does not get people out of poverty, but it does increase employment rates momentarily, so Governments encourage it. We need a focus on where we are politically.

We need to consider decent jobs in balance with the lives we want to lead with our children, older people and our communities. We lose perspective if we only focus on jobs. Work in the home and care work are undervalued. We need to question what is the starting point of this discussion, what is the labour market. The increased and high unemployment rate was highlighted. What seems to be missing is an assessment of where we are. Jobs were shed in the recession. We need to raise issues of taxation; there are very wealthy people getting wealthier as we go on.

What do we mean by smart economy? We can have that without smart jobs!

The EU is facing a huge problem of trust. We need to be talking about employment and peace because the armed industry is a major employer.

The local economy is very important. This is where we should place a focus.

Debate on social enterprise ranged from cautioning an over emphasis on social enterprise to the sometimes lack of respect for social enterprise and employment schemes. Long-term programmes are needed as deep-seated situations do not change in a year. At the same time, social enterprises are not the sole solution to providing jobs. Some are quite poor employers. Wages can be low and jobs short-term.

Workshop 3

Measures to support people into decent jobs

Furthermore, we should not take away the responsibility from the labour market as a whole. Now also is a time to ask where corporate social responsibility lies.

One participant who has a disability had been on a training project for four years. However, the job the participant has been training for is now cut. The participant must be unemployed for one year before entering another scheme to train for another job.

Not addressing social issues properly has massive economic costs and we can find many examples, the current crisis being the most obvious. It was argued that the United States refused to deal with the social issue of houses, and that caused the global collapse.

We need to make sure to be talking about Structural Funds and the added-value of the EU. A third of EU money is Structural Funds. We need more talk about what is the right way.

Workshop 4

Fighting Poverty by combating discrimination and promoting diversity

Chair: [Maciej Kucharczyk](#), AGE Platform

Irish perspective: [Niall Crowley](#), Independent Consultant

Slovakian & EU perspective: [Slavomira Macakova](#), EAPN Slovakia

Context: The crisis is impacting worse on the most vulnerable. The workshop discussed the link between discrimination and poverty, evaluated national approaches to fighting poverty through combating discrimination and the implications of an EU Directive, and the need for proposals to strengthen the link and delivery at national and EU level, building on EAPN proposals.

Workshop 4

Fighting Poverty by combating discrimination and promoting diversity

Key discussion points:

Only one in ten Roma is in work in Slovakia – poverty traps are passed from generation to generation. Roma unemployment rate is 46% compared to 10% of non-Roma. In settlements there can be up to 100 % unemployment. Jobs for Roma are mostly temporary. The crisis has exacerbated the situation.

In Ireland, Traveler organisations highlight the systematic discrimination against Travelers over a long period and as a result of policies. People are 'survivors', courageous and brave.

In Ireland, there has been a backlash against equality and a blocking of progress on eliminating discrimination and poverty. There has been a fragmentation of the equality agenda and income inequality has increased. EU Fundamental Rights Agency research on discrimination confirmed that Roma and Travelers are the most discriminated against minority, despite the initiatives taken. Roma experience provides a good example of the need for an integrated approach. 'Analysis is important. It does matter what you think'.

Develop an integrated approach to mainstreaming in policy making and bringing this to member State level through the Structural Funds regulations, EU2020 guidance and OMC guidance. This could build on separate requirements in the Lisbon Treaty regarding gender mainstreaming, non-discrimination mainstreaming and inclusion mainstreaming.

New provisions in the Lisbon Treaty require the European Commission, in defining and implementing policies and activities, to take account of requirements regarding the fight against social exclusion. The European Commission should aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religious belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in defining and implementing policies and activities.

Workshop 4

Fighting Poverty by combating discrimination and promoting diversity

These provisions require new initiatives. Why not integrate anti poverty and anti discrimination mainstreaming in a single template?

The EU and Ireland are challenged to go beyond current approaches to inequality and poverty which are inadequate and fragmented. A more coherent and integrated approach to equality in terms of redistribution, recognition and sharing of influence is required - the Lisbon Treaty provides a basis for this if the will is there.

The European Commission could also further develop the Open Method of Coordination through new guidelines that direct the member state action plans. The Lisbon Treaty should draw a focus on discrimination into the OMC and this could be developed through the guidelines to the member states.

The equality dimension of the guidelines could be enhanced by:

- Naming the challenge to address exclusion in terms of distribution, recognition and influence.
- Targeting groups experiencing different forms and different combinations of these injustices.
- Address the implications of the diversity of all target groups.

Require equality mainstreaming at member state level and develop supports to implement this approach. With regard to the 2010 context, an integrated approach is needed between social inclusion and anti discrimination. There should be a pro active “positive duty” on equality.

Workshop 5

Gender in the fight against Poverty

Chair: [Louise Richardson](#), Older Women's Network & EAPN Ireland

Irish perspective: [Susan McKay](#), National Women's Council of Ireland

Swedish & EU perspective: [Gunvi Haggren](#), EAPN Sweden and Social Inclusion Working Group

Context: Women are more at risk of poverty than men. Although an increasing number of women work, they are mainly concentrated in precarious, low paid and often part-time jobs – with little progress being made on closing the gender pay and working conditions gap. The workshop discussed the link between gender and poverty, why women are more at risk of poverty and explore what is needed to make progress at national and EU level, in the context of the EAPN proposals.

Workshop 5

Gender in the fight against Poverty

Key discussion points:

Mainstream gender dimension in the future Europe 2020 strategy while paying specific attention to women as a specific group at risk of poverty;

In Ireland, the government has not taken the gender aspect into consideration when looking at the impact of the crisis. For example, child benefit was cut significantly and 30% of family income goes to childcare costs as compared to 12% in other EU countries. The invisibility of women in decision making is a significant problem. More equal participation in decision making will change views, attitudes and values.

Poverty is not just about money but the power to make decisions. It cannot be seen only as an individual problem but is related to structural injustices.

It is important to remember that not all women are the same. Traveler women face multiple discrimination – they are discriminated against as Travelers, as Traveler women, and as women. There are many barriers for Traveler women accessing services; must tackle this discrimination.

Migrant women can also experience multiple discrimination. There are only limited protections available to them against poverty and exclusion.

Domestic violence is silently condoned. There is evidence that domestic violence increases in a recession. Furthermore, there is little consequence for the perpetrator. In one participant's Domestic Violence Service, the experience was that while 400 people accessed the service, only 4 perpetrators were punished; 3 women died. The EU has to emphasise the importance of values including an EU free of violence.

Workshop 5

Gender in the fight against Poverty

Eliminate gender pay gap and ensure access to employment. Inequality is linked to differences in income. In this regard there are also differences among women with some groups, e.g. migrant women and older women facing other forms of discrimination as well.

Encourage shared roles between women and men.

Need to look not only at solutions but also causes. Need to consider universal childcare in eliminating poverty. Child benefit is still an important aspect and women should not be forced into the labour market. A minimum income for children should be a point in the debate.

Need to provide everyone with a decent income. Intergenerational transmission of poverty is evident. There needs to be adequate child benefits. Lone parents are at particular risk of poverty.
“Victories don’t last forever so we need to constantly fight for the battles won.”

Building Bridges

Summary of lunchtime discussions

ECONOMICS (Moderator: [Paula Clancy](#), TASC)

A progressive European economic strategy to respond to the current crisis is needed, progressive being described as one which valued human rights and equality.

People need to be persuaded that more equal economies are more competitive.

A better system to measure economic and social progress is necessary, apart from the traditional measure of growth of GNP. This could take the form of a social cohesion index that would include such elements as inequality and homelessness. The economic costs of poverty must be taken into account.

Levels of social welfare achieved in recent years need to be preserved.

To protect the poor in Greece in an economic restructuring package.

Building Bridges

Summary of lunchtime discussions

DEMOCRACY (Moderator: [Andrea Pappin](#), European Movement)

What is Democracy? How do we define it? There is a lack of 'vision' around the future of democracy. It is not just about elections, as many people are excluded from the electoral process. Democracy should be about the social impact of national policies.

There is a need to separate 'representative democracy' and 'participative democracy'. They are complementary to each other, the latter encouraging individual and community participation input into public policies that affect the lives of people – there is a challenge to get more community involvement and to build 'participative democracy'

Opportunities must be provided at all levels of government for citizens to have an input into policy-making. The Irish social partnership model was an example for other countries, but this has come unraveled in the current economic crisis and there is now a greater sense of exclusion from public policy making.

The European Union model is about economics rather than about people – social policy does not get an equal emphasis as economic policy within the EU institutions.

There is a need to link society with democracy but how can we get more community action to advance participative democracy?

Building Bridges

Summary of lunchtime discussions

HUMAN RIGHTS (Moderator: [Colm O’Gorman](#), Amnesty International Irish Section)

Human rights should be indivisible but they continue to be separated. 9/11 has had a significant impact on human rights and arguably has contributed to the continuing division between sets of rights.

There was a reflection on the impact of the geopolitical context at the time the Universal Declaration was drawn up and a resulting division of two sets of rights.

There is a causal relationship between discrimination and poverty.

Rights need to be ensured in order that people can fulfill their responsibilities.

The need to ensure that human rights discourse and practice is accessible.

Building Bridges

Summary of lunchtime discussions

ENVIRONMENT (Moderator: [Michael Ewing](#), Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership)

All people are entitled to be involved in decision making.

All people entitled to justice and information on the environment.

Citizen participation is needed in relation to environmental issues and access to information held by local authorities.

All agreed we would like to see environmental democracy. In this regard, the ARRHUS Convention was highlighted.

There is a need to be more sustainable in relation to the creation of energy and usage of these resources.

Building Bridges

Summary of lunchtime discussions

TRADE UNION (Moderator: [Esther Lynch](#), Irish Congress of Trade Union)

Trade Unions and civil society organizations concerned with poverty and social exclusion, share many common objectives and working methods, and there is highly developed cooperation at many levels, including at European level.

There is potential to further develop working relationships, which in some contexts are at present underdeveloped.

NGOs can reach sectors of society which are under-organized/un-organised from a Union perspective including the unemployed and those who are most vulnerable in the labour market.

NGOs need to develop greater structural links with the trade union movement, including through direct membership of unions. Particularly as NGOs are themselves vulnerable to cut backs in the current context.

The economic and social crisis has raised many common concerns for NGOs and Trade Unions, including protecting minimum wage and public services, responding to the unemployment crisis and protecting social welfare. A shared agenda must be developed which can provide a united opposition to the dominant model of neo-liberalism which has informed many of the responses to the crisis in Ireland and in Europe.

Building Bridges

Summary of lunchtime discussions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (Moderator: [Aoife Black](#), Trócaire)

The struggles against poverty in Europe and globally meet many of the same obstacles and require the same principles to confront it.

In the EU, many important lessons about community development and how to organise have come from contact with areas with different traditions of struggle, particularly the Philippines, parts of Latin America etc.

The increasing involvement of the IMF and the World Bank in EU member states, and cooperation between them and the European Commission, provides an important common ground for learning and struggle between developing countries and the EU anti-poverty groups.

Migration policy is an important point of contact - migration policy should balance the needs of 'recipient' and 'sender' countries.

The debate on climate change has focused the whole world, for the first time, on a common fight for survival, even if the Copenhagen summit did not deliver much yet.

4. Plenary. Europe's Social Future: A Renegiated Agenda

The plenary session was chaired by Hugh Frazer, Adjunct Professor at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Inputs were provided by distinguished speakers, Jerome Vignon, former Director DG Employment and Michel Dolle, Research Centre on Income, Costs and Social Cohesion.

This section outlines the key points raised by the speakers, provides a synopsis of the questions raised in the discussion and the responses from the panel.

Introduction

Hugh Frazer opened the plenary session, stressing that we are at a critical moment for the future of a social Europe and by highlighting four key facts.

First, we are at the end of a 10 year process. What will be the EU objectives for the next decade and will there be a stronger social inclusion agenda? What instruments will strengthen the social dimension? Can there be greater cooperation at a European level? Secondly, we are now in a European Year that focuses on Poverty and Social Exclusion. Can this year have a real, lasting impact on raising the social dimension at an EU level? Thirdly, we are in the middle of an economic and financial crisis. Can we use this crisis as an opportunity, not to go back to where we were but rather to adopt a new model of social development? Fourthly, the newly signed Lisbon Treaty gives impetus to combating poverty and achieving social justice, equality and the protection of the rights of the child. The questions now are how that actually affects what happens in Europe and how it can happen.

He invited speakers to give their perspective on Europe's Social Future and a renegotiated agenda.



Jerome Vignon
former Director DG Employment

Through his input, Jerome Vignon argued for an intellectual analysis of poverty and inclusive national programmes to address poverty. He argued that too often poverty and social exclusion are seen only from the point of view of compassion. However, by sticking only to compassion we cannot fight the evil that is poverty. Also we must go beyond a utilitarian view of the exploitation of human resources. By now we know the limitation of the 'make work pay' approach.

Two factors were highlighted as contributing to the current crisis including a total lack of interest in social inequality and meaningless arrogance of the very few. This is a message that has become visible. The crisis has come about due to a total lack of interest in social inequality. It was thought that we could make money out of lending people money at high interest rates. Having achieved financial success, the few did not respect social rules and were not to be obliged to pay social taxes. Such was the arrogance in some very few, that contributed significantly to the current crisis.

Jerome Vignon explained that there are only four targets that he wants to set for the EU2020 Strategy. He highlighted the fundamental problem with a focus on university graduates, in light of the realities of the 13% of the population who leave school without any qualifying degree and will never go to university. This he highlighted as one of a number of bottlenecks. Without an effective fight against poverty, a strategy will never be able to reach its objective of growth and collective work.

Jerome Vignon proceeded to name **four principal targets** for EU2020, including:

Clarity and visibility of the EU objective to reduce poverty. Reduction of poverty by 2020 may become one of the four or five key targets of the EU 2020 strategy. For this objective to happen effectively, it has to be linked in a convincing way. It needs to be linked to actions undertaken by government and social actors. There needs to be a clear link articulated between the target and the ways to achieve the target. The rate of child poverty needs to be considered carefully in this proposal. The objective is to reduce extreme poverty; this is due to the failure to secure a minimum income. These policies must be mainstreamed. There cannot be a situation where growth and economy are considered on the one hand and social factors on the other. The objective must be reflected by all instruments and all the member states including at a structural level. Express solidarity including when member states want to combat poverty.

A true ownership of the EU strategy through the national plans. While supporting the idea of as much autonomy as possible to member states, they cannot be allowed to oppose this idea with the principle of subsidiarity. After a critical consultation with the European Commission, national partners and civil society, there is a need for a shared diagnosis. Then member states would determine the targets to reflect an effort, based on the starting situation but also on the previously referred to bottlenecks. To carry out a shared diagnosis, time is needed; much more than the three or four months given by the OMC if we want the EU2020 strategy to be efficient and to work correctly.

Indicators. At present, the monitoring mechanisms happen too quickly. This practice turns the common evaluation process into a purely bureaucratic process. Distinction between two elements needs to be drawn. There is the qualitative assessment which can take place on a yearly basis. We also need however indicators, such as those identified in the areas of employment and the economic field but also in the field of poverty of social exclusion. We know for example where there is an increase in unemployment; in many member states where there are food banks and where there are more people asking to go to reception centres.

These indicators are not homogenous but there are enough to send a signal to the heads of governments. Therefore we need prior indicators when it comes to the implementation of policies after five years. He said that he would like this to be a political commitment and that a new government would state whether they accepted the commitments made by previous governments in this area. Transparency requires that this is completed.

Strong enough and realistic enough in our objectives. We are sometimes portrayed as crazy dreamers unaware of the global economic factors. Let us not fall into this trap, he stressed. The very presence of Michel Dolle at the conference is a signal of our seriousness. That said, we will need to be realistic about our work. Soon, decision makers will be a meeting? of managers regarding an exit strategy and sustainability. As the process needs to be rigorous, we need to ask for an impact assessment to ensure that measures do not impact more on poor rather than the wealthy. The issue of social justice must be taken into consideration and he asked why there is no social audit of proposals.

A clear message has been sent to the political leaders by people in poverty at each annual meeting of people experiencing poverty since the series of meetings commenced in 2000. People remind us that they do not call for a revolution that will change everything over night but just want a measure that will show progress for their future, the future of their children and of society. They give a note of realism and strictness. In conclusion Jerome Vignon stated that because we have to be realistic and imaginative, we must echo their message of life.



Michel Dolle Research Centre on Income, Costs and Social Cohesion

Informed by the reflections of both he and Jacques Delors over the last ten years in the areas of employment, income and social cohesion, Michel Dolle set out to answer the question, why and how the European Union and the member states should invest more in social issues. He outlined four themes: 1. Going beyond the welfare state by developing social investment; 2. The need for critical reflection on the economic objectives and criteria for effectiveness of public policies; 3. The importance of employment in the fight against poverty; 4. A priority: the fight against child poverty.

1. Going beyond the welfare state by developing social investment

The welfare state is in crisis, Michel Dolle argued. Faced with economic and social risks, including those related to unemployment, there are three approaches that might be adopted:

a) Compensation for the risks by providing alternative income, which is the primary role played by the welfare state; b) Supporting people return to work through activation; and c) Preventing risks from occurring, through a set of policies termed social investment. The best protection that a state can provide to people is that it can

provide the basis of their independence, including access to quality jobs. The state policies of social investment concern labour law and education, childcare, training, etc.

Focusing on the third option of prevention through social investment, Michel Dolle argued that social investment does not replace the previous two functions, it complements them. In particular, pensions and healthcare are two major areas that will always retain the responsibility of the traditional welfare state. He noted also that state investment can contribute to improving economic prosperity in the classical sense. Many studies show for example, that investment in the fight against child poverty generates future revenue which exceeds the costs incurred.

2. The need for critical reflection on the objectives and criteria of economic efficiency of public policies

In the “Proposals for a new European strategy after 2010 (The EU we can trust)”, there is an emphasis on openly analyzing the causes of the crisis and the role played by the model based on growth and employment.

Managing the economy might be compared to the art of managing one’s house. The question needs to be asked, “to what purpose”? Michel Dolle also noted that there is no single, precise definition of the term, Social Justice. Without democratic debate about our social choices, our criteria for action and the previous logic of the subordination of social issues to maximizing economic growth will remain. In this case, the social objectives of a programme in 2020 will risk being quickly forgotten again for a reorientation of European objectives on the primacy of economics, as we saw with the revised Lisbon Strategy 2005.

Rawls’ thinking on efficiency and social justice (Theory of Justice) are central to Michel Dolle’s thinking on how to organise the basic structures of society. Rawls’ second principle can be described as follows: there may be differences in social positions, but these must on the one hand, be tied to functions and positions open to all with equal fair opportunities. On the other hand, they must provide the greatest benefit to the poorest members of society. The search for a just equality of opportunity must also be inspired by for example, the functioning of public service employment and access to training. We need to find other criteria for the way we measure success. The question remains, which other criteria.

3. The importance of employment in the fight against poverty

Despite the existence of “working poor” and probably increasing numbers in the current crisis, it seems that access to employment must remain a priority in the fight against poverty because employment remains an essential part of participation in society. The jobs created must be of sufficient duration (in work time and duration of contract) to help provide a decent income. Precarious employment is not inevitable in a service economy that requires flexibility. It takes creativity on the organisation of work and a clear willingness of the actors. There has not been sufficient emphasis on this point in either labour market reforms or in public policy. In illustrating his point, Michel Dolle referred to the fiscal support for the food service which is massive in France but did not come with enough pressure from the government for job creation or job security.

4. A priority: the fight against child poverty and its consequences on their development

Child poverty is a central point from the perspective of a long-term strategy (2020) in the fight against poverty and it is one of the most difficult to combat. We can no longer deny the fact that there is a strong determinism in the intergenerational reproduction of poverty.

Child poverty is one factor that impacts most directly through its impact on health, on the material resources available to children as well on the ability to participate fully in education within and outside of the school. Poverty experienced by parents also impacts indirectly on children. Parents experiencing economic stress may not be as able as others to give their children the necessary environment for their development. Furthermore, the factors that have contributed to family poverty status (including the qualifications or training for parents) will impact negatively on the support that parents can offer children. Therefore, it is important to consider and reduce both child poverty and poverty experienced by families. And therefore it is not just, even if it is an essential component, about reducing poverty among families.

It seems that awareness of child poverty varies between European countries. Northern European countries for example have lower rates of child poverty than the average rate.

In other countries including the United Kingdom, but also Ireland, the severity of the problem led to targeted strategies to fight against child poverty. We have seen how, despite careful preparation, despite the programmes being implemented, despite a careful process of evaluation, it was difficult to make progress. In still other countries including France, little action has been taken. The goal of eradicating child poverty is simply

stated but without further definition or implementation of strategy.

In conclusion, Michel Dolle alerted the conference to the reality that in most of our European countries, notably France, the subject of child poverty intersects with and reinforces the poverty of migrants, a topic that appears to be the blind spot of our public policies.

Discussion



Inputs and questions from the floor highlighted the invisibility of certain groups in debate e.g. asylum seekers; the failure of systems to meet their needs and the powerlessness experienced in everyday lives including in basic choices such as what one eats; shared issues experienced by those living in poverty; the importance of standing in solidarity and the need for solidarity between groups experiencing poverty including those on low incomes and vulnerable groups including asylum seekers and Travellers. One contribution also asked if the value placed on meritocracy was a contributing factor in poverty and social exclusion.

Responding to the questions, Jerome Vignon commented that he needed to react albeit that the response would be poor in comparison to the questions asked. With regard to asylum, he explained that the Lisbon Treaty gives EU Institutions a greater role in the handling of asylum. He acknowledged the struggle to ensure human conditions and expressed hope that his successor would have more success, highlighting potential in the Charter. He referred to his earlier point on invisibility of children of migrant families reflecting that the point made from the floor brought this to life. There is a need to focus on migrant families and poverty. Migrants are not the only group experiencing poverty; he highlighted the potential of Fintan Farrell's argument for universal services as good for all groups including migrants and asylum seekers.

Struck by the question on meritocracy, he stated that his concern was more with those on the lower end of the scale who had no access to employment.

Following Jerome Vignon, Michel Dolle responded saying that issues of poverty can affect all migrants including undocumented people. Although member states have signed up to international instruments that provide for the right to minimal resources, and minimal income guarantees, these are at a national level and provided to regular migrants; he thus posed the question how it is possible to adhere to these if not applicable to all resident in a state.

Responding to the question of meritocracy, he referred to the taxation issue in the US as illustrative of the problem. In the US in 1929 when Roosevelt was President, the disparity in incomes was high at a ratio of 1:1000. When he died in 1950, the ratio was 1:100. This margin had been narrowed significantly through taxation. Since Reagan's time and through the application of neo liberal economic policies, the ratio is once again 1:100; effectively the US is back to where it was in 1929 at the time of the crisis. This should challenge us in our exit strategy out of the current crisis. However, there is a high possibility we shall repeat the same error. We should not allow the so-called best to get it all at the expense of the rest of society. He referred to the thirteenth richest man in the world who famously declared that were he born in Peru or Bangladesh, even with his brain he would not have achieved what he has achieved. He instigated a petition against the reduction of taxes of the wealthy. He acknowledges that his wage is not as a result of talent but due to the fact that he lives in a society that rewards his talent; therefore we should return to society what society has rewarded to us.

5. The Fight Against Poverty & Social Exclusion in the EU2020 Agenda - Panel Debate

Introduction

The panel debate was chaired by Professor Brigid Laffan, Principal UCD College of Human Sciences. Prof. Laffan introduced Tony de Koster who gave an input on the EU2020 agenda, responding also to inputs from earlier in the day. Following his input and questions, proposals were made to the conference on the five workshop themes. The panel of speakers were invited to respond to the proposals. This section of the report outlines the proposals and provides an overview of the response by panel speakers and by delegates. Panel speakers included Mary Doyle, Department of An Taoiseach, Ireland; Proinsias de Rossa, MEP; Tonnie De Koster, Secretariat General, European Commission; Ludo Horemans, President EAPN Europe; and Jozef Niemiec, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

Tonnie de Koster Secretariat General, European Commission

Tonnie de Koster, speaking on behalf of the European Commission, focused on the development of EU2020 and highlighted in particular the changing context including demographic; green growth; employment and learning lessons from the current crisis.

Tonnie de Koster thanked EAPN for their active participation in the debate that informed the European Commission's proposals for EU2020 Strategy. The deadlines set for the process were short in light of two factors including the institutional calendar but also as the Commission's recognition of the urgency to have a strategy ready. There is a real expectation for the EU to have an exit strategy that goes beyond a fiscal exist strategy and ensures a vision to transform the EU over the next ten years.

In setting the context, he outlined the challenged faced by the EU. First of all, there is a scarcity of resources. There are also additional, new challenges. We face an unprecedented crisis which we have not yet exited which has resulted in growing pressure on our finances, low growth and high unemployment that is affecting young people in particular. This is the scenario we must avoid; we need a strategy that can make sure that we come out stronger rather than weakened. The EU needs to ensure the sustainability of our socio-economic model. This cannot be taken as a given and requires that the 27 member states act; that we act at the same time as looking at the world around us. The discussion is currently ongoing.

Secondly, the agenda for smart growth and green growth was highlighted and explained as meaning that the EU wants a society that is built on knowledge, idea and innovation. Investment in the smart of our society is important. Green growth, also important, requires that as we grow we also reduce our dependency on resources and tackle climate change.

Speaking on employment and inclusion, Tonnie de Koster reflected on points raised in earlier sessions referring to different pillars. Around the vision, he remarked that it is not one about pillars; rather we need to act in all policy areas at the same time. In the real world these issues are not dissociated; they are not pillars. What is needed is an agenda which allows you press the buttons at the same time.

Thirdly, in terms of the context from a European perspective we need to draw lessons from the crisis. It is important at a European level to be aware of our economies. Globally this has become blatantly apparent. There is now a recognition that in all 27 member states even the largest of them cannot manage alone any

more. Working together is essential. A second lesson is that it is necessary to focus more on sustainability, not just in ecological but in also economic and social terms. We need to make sure that the social and economic model we select is sustainable over the long term and the macro economic level. There needs to be a focus on the delivery of reforms to make this happen.

The strategy is not just about vision but on delivery. Tonnie de Koster argued that we have enough vision in Europe; at this time we need to make sure that we deliver on that vision. Discussions on the European 2020 Strategy are ongoing. The Heads of Government were due to meet on 3rd March 2010 to put forward proposals and make decisions. There is a strong focus on delivery and making sure that the necessary mechanisms are in place. Reform means setting a limited series of targets. The President of the European Council has mentioned a limited number of targets. Targets shall be discussed over the coming weeks and months. They will have to be programmes to deliver these targets both at a European and a national level. If there is a target for poverty, he stressed the role of a flagship action against poverty as well as a possible flagship action on the employment side. He also emphasised the existence of good practices that have proven useful such as the Open Method of Coordination. All citizens need to be made aware that they also have their role to play so communication will be another essential action.

In conclusion, Tonnie de Koster stated that ultimately his message is not just about generating consensus at a European level but that it has to happen by cabinets at a national level, because the decision lies with the European Council. The agenda going forward needs to be one where all buttons are pressured at the same time.

Questions and inputs from the floor centred on the perceived support or otherwise of the Commission on poverty issues where one delegate argued that activists can count less and less on the Commission supporting them at a national level; welcoming the inclusion of a focus on poverty in draft EU2020 proposals from the Commission; the extent of a focus on discrimination in EU2020; the persistence of the inequality gap; the need for a jobs strategy; the lack of vision for a Social Europe.

Responding to questions raised, Tonnie de Koster firstly disagreed that the Commission supports activists less and less at a national level. Where there is agreement however, is on the importance of communicating better on this through the years ahead. However, we need to recognise that in the areas in question, there is only at best mixed responsibility between the European and the national level so we have to find that right balance in how we communicate.

There are several questions regarding the context of future proposals. The step of adoption of strategy is critically important, the step whereby we will define different flagship programmes and national flagship programmes. He informed the conference that by 26th March it will be known whether the Commission's proposals will be retained. Then the next question will be the various programmes to deliver on the proposal. These need to be defined and this shall be done at a later stage, probably into the second half of the year and onwards. There at that point, critical issues such as inequality including gender inequality, need to be addressed.

With regard to a jobs strategy, he confirmed that there are clear discussions on jobs and this is essential. The EU needs growth to generate jobs. He identified as an essential point the need to generate smarter and greener jobs. We need to take right decisions on the outset from Europe. Need to look around us to other countries, some are at the forefront in these areas and others are catching up relatively fast. There is a sense of urgency about having a strategy in place, underpinned by targets.

Finally on the vision, he suggested that here again there is a variety within the EU. It is important that we recognise the different realities across the member states. The idea is not only to have targets at a European level but that they translate at the national level, taking into account the different starting points of member states. Highlighting again the need for communication and delivery, he explained that while the vision of the Lisbon Strategy focus is well known, there has been less focus on what has been achieved. He emphasised that participants be aware that such a strategy needs to be conducted as a partnership, increasingly so at the local level.

Ludo Horemans President EAPN

Ludo Horemans, President EAPN agreed with proposals stating that it is important that all the issues be stretched out to form more concrete policy. Key points raised by Ludo Horemans included the potential for shaping anti poverty policy implementation; clarity on aim for the eradication of poverty; caution on placing the biggest burden on the weakest shoulders and the role of targets; the need to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty; the positive impact of raising minimum income on the economy; and the need to focus on child poverty.

He referred to the confirmation received that the fight against poverty has been included as one of the pillars of an EU2020 Strategy but asserted the need to wait until the final documents are presented. At this stage, he proposed that even then we know we can shape the decision regarding how the policy can be implemented. He stressed the importance of implementation and the need for the Strategy to be more concrete.

Referring to proposals and specifically to the proposal from the workshop on a minimum income that a target be introduced to reduce poverty by 25% by 2020, he emphasised the need to be clear about our position. The overall aim should be the complete eradication of poverty. If we ask a person experiencing poverty, it will be yesterday. What is 25% is different when a country has an average of 20% and 7% ?- this is very different. When and how do we want to prevent placing the biggest burden on the weakest shoulders, also what should be the role of governments. That is a target in percentage we should think about it however. Those member states which have the most means could aim to reduce their percentage. Are we going to give them a two year time limit within which they are required to achieve a 2% reduction while another member state is required to achieve more in that period. This is not just. Would a more equal system whereby all member states are required to reduce poverty by a set target not be more effective?

What is unequivocal is the need for a commitment to eradicate poverty completely. We can also focus on some issues that are very inhumane, such as street homelessness. It is important also to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and to have more specific recommendations on this. We cannot disconnect child poverty from poverty of the family. At the same time if a child is to have opportunities, there has to be investment in education. Ludo Horemans pointed out that when we hear there are not enough resources to achieve all our goals on the social policy front, it depends on what is being looked at. There were a lot of means to save the banks and it was probably necessary to do so to avoid a worse situation. However, now

that it has been done, it is not sufficient to say that while it is a pity, we do not have enough left for social policy.

Raising the minimum income would benefit the economy. People who need the resources will spend them and bring back into the economy. Even from an economic perspective, it is important to raise minimum income.

Regarding services, the example of child poverty comes to the fore. There are many links between child poverty and e.g. housing, energy, services. How can a child do homework when the electricity has been cut off? There should be a policy implemented at the member state level which ensures that wherever there are children, there will be no reduction in means even where authorities may think parents are not managing so well. The question of the right to services is one to be secured through legislation. For the end of the European Year, there should be some perspective on a direction for minimum income. A minimum income shall not itself be achieved by the end of the year but there should be some direction by then.

Pronsias de Rossa MEP

Pronsias de Rossa, MEP followed reflecting that what we face today is the perennial problem of how do you get to where you want to be.

Means include political engagement at a European Parliament level and also feeding back to national parliaments. He explained that what had struck him about the discussion and EU2020 proposal was that it differs little from Lisbon. Regarding the Lisbon Strategy, the big failure has been in implementation. This is not a new debate. One of the debates in which he had participated in highlighted the fact that in order to have strategy, all elements must be integrated and treated equally; it is not adequate to put economics at the top and say that the rest shall follow. He cautioned that while we might be getting a more sophisticated rhetoric from the Commission, there is not a political majority to support the kind of programme that was being outlined. A significant percentage of member state governments are centre right. All emphasis is on an exit strategy and getting debt down to a manageable level.

On the question of minimum income, he drew attention to the fact that the EU is specifically excluded from making laws related to pay, which is excluded from any harmonisation. He explained that the OMC was intended to overcome this fact but in reality, there are some areas in which the EU has no legislative power. He argued that in fact the OMC has not been open; if anything he described it as a secret process, highlighting in particular the absence of national parliaments which have not taken ownership of the OMC. Reflecting on how this might be overcome, he argued that unless the OMC is strengthened – given that it is again going to be used for EU2020 –and that targets mean something, there will be little change in this regard.

He acknowledged the obligation on MEPs including on himself in that capacity but pointed also to the obligation on organisations such as those present, to engage at the national level as well as at the European level. The European Council is not just an intangible body out there but is made up of national ministers. Civil society has a critical role to play in securing a directive on social services, particularly as there is limited political will for it. He suggested that this is achievable but will require hard work and greater degree of coordination and encourages organisations to define what they want and to lobby politicians.

Eradication of poverty cannot fall off the agenda. While targets can be set for the next five years by all means, the eradication of poverty has to remain the goal. He raised the idea of transaction tax as possibly one of the most useful tools we could use, reflecting that the money this could generate would give money for all the

required services.

In conclusion, Pronias de Rossa cautioned the conference not to assume decent jobs are just a question of good will. There are challenges at present including for example discussions on health and safety in the workplace; the battle regarding parental leaving to women and men; battles on working time and a lack of support for a directive on working time. If there is going to be decent work, there is going to have to be coordination between what organisations want and trade union responsibilities. Politicians need to ensure the necessary legislation is in place and employers comply with them.

There is great potential in current situation. Clearly there is a crisis and clear difficulties but also there is the creation of new ideas. Political classes however, are arguing for maintaining the current system but adding a few bits to it. We need to convince people that there are new ways of doing things, that what we had been doing has failed.

Josef Niemiec ETUC

Josef Niemiec, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) explained that in speaking on behalf of workers, he also speaks on behalf of the poor as one out of four workers are the working poor whose wages do not allow them to exit poverty. Indeed, addressing this issue is a responsibility of the trade unions. He acknowledged that the unions have not done what is expected of them in order to achieve a world where employment could be a way out of poverty. He named assessment of the existing strategy as a starting point, arguing that it almost had the expected impact. Now is the time to assess the achievements, realising that inequalities persist throughout the EU.

Josef Niemiec argued that both an exit strategy and an entry strategy are needed. From workers' perspective, the EU Strategy should specify how we are going to organise the exit strategy as its impact will prevail into the longer term. He stated that there will be more job losses throughout the year. Many of the jobs that have been created have been in services which are precarious. They cannot be all smart and green jobs. Workers must also be told how we are going to transition from the current economy into a new, smart economy. The European Commission says it needs flagships; these need to be concrete.

He posed the question of how the different sectors might organise including how to develop the instruments together. How also are we going to deal with the issue of taxation and the distribution of wealth. Furthermore, questions remain on how the exit strategy will be funded or investment made in a greener economy. He argued that the answer is clear, we need more money, a greater budget and we must voice this message altogether. This must be analysed in a more global context. He explained that ETUC is focusing on how public services are financed to guarantee access to services as a fundamental right and also how social protection is financed.

On the issue of active inclusion, he explained that ETUC can support the idea of a minimum income. However, as a European organisation, they are not yet ready to support a directive or another EU instrument on this. Up until now, the position has been to say that while a minimum income needs to be secured, it needs to happen at a national level. This is a question that ETUC is likely to address again and hopefully with others. We said that we have to work together to develop shared instruments. He also highlighted ETUC's imminent work on the inclusive labour market and the need for their perspective, for shared responsibility as well as a commitment from employers.

Finally, ETUC is trying to collaborate more with organisations working in the area of active inclusion such as EAPN, the Spring Alliance, and to promote similar and common ideas.

Mary Doyle Department of An Taoiseach, Ireland

Mary Doyle, Department of An Taoiseach, Ireland offered a policy perspective. She emphasized that we are at a time of crisis and great change. She said that she does not always believe that a crisis is an opportunity. While she would rather that we did not have to deal with the current crisis, she suggested that if dealing with it collectively perhaps it then presents an opportunity.

One of the significant challenges for Ireland now and indeed for every EU country, she argued, is how to join elements of domestic policy on recovery together and then to join that with an integration of policy at the EU level. Clearly an agenda is emerging here which understands the relevance of policies and the need for this to be administered in a more conjoined, authoritative and sustainable manner than in the past. This is not an easy situation. There is a moment in time and we are in it, when big decisions will be made.

Mary Doyle argued that it is also important to recognise in this discussion that the decisions to be made are very value laden. People feel strongly about the decisions and there are widely opposing views on sensitive issues. She emphasised the importance of understanding that the job of the political system is to make those identifications and to mediate the positions. Suggesting that this is a challenge that will come very sharply into focus soon, she pointed to Ireland's experience and Ireland's familiarity with such issues. There has been an evolution of social and environmental policy in the Irish State. Lessons from Ireland can be brought to bear on the current context. Progress made has resulted in robust policy frameworks.

She highlighted the interconnections, posing for example the question of how we connect poverty and the green economy. With regard to interconnections she points in this context to some of the ambitious partnership processes and their outcomes. As the next step, she postulated that each sector needs to understand what the other sector is saying and get the interconnections into place.

The challenge now is to hold onto a lot of the progress that has been made over the last few years. One of the big challenges will be unemployment. While not predicting where unemployment will go, it is clear that many people and many families will be affected. If attention is not paid, the impact will remain with families for a long time. We need to keep this at the forefront of our minds. Therefore, government policy should focus on jobs, on unemployment and the labour market. Government needs to ensure it achieves the right balance. This

however is not an uncontested space and national policy will need to fit with EU policy. The big challenge is finding a reasonable balance between key priorities on the one hand while ensuring there are sufficient levels needed to pull people out of unemployment on the other hand, in order to ensure policy implementation and outcomes. While a relatively small number of targets are required, we need to actually name the set of levers that will make a difference.

Mary Doyle argued that making the policy is the easy bit; the focus on delivery is the more difficult piece to put in place. Taking a short term view of the policy calendar, a lot shall happen in 2010. It will be important that in conclusion a reasonable number of targets are set and that they are the targets that shall make a difference, particularly at a governmental level.

X. Appendices

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