

EAPN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2011 – FINAL DECLARATION

“Europe needs a New Heart” Year 2011

The General Assembly took place amidst growing anger at the failure of the EU and Member State Governments to adopt solidarity measures to protect people rather than markets in response to the current crisis. The delegates warned that Europe will not have the support of its citizens, if it is seen to be undermining the foundations of the ‘Welfare States’.

EAPN sees that across the European Union the ‘rescue’ and bail out plans, are putting people deeper into poverty and threatening social cohesion while reinforcing the dominance of the financial markets and speculating agencies. In particular, in those countries which are subject to compliance with EU/IMF financial agreements, with loan facilities at punitive rates of interest, the response to the crisis has been driven by austerity programmes which are disproportionately impacting on the most vulnerable in society.

While enforcing unsustainable austerity programmes, the EU and Member States have persistently refused to impose economic discipline or financial accountability on the rapacious speculative trading systems that caused the crisis both internationally and across the EU. In addition the European Central Bank seems to be putting the interest of Banks above the well-being of Europe’s citizens.

With these approaches Europe will never succeed in driving down rates of poverty, and its response to the crisis undermines both the immediate and long term perspective for securing more equal and just societies. In this context it is not surprising, but deeply worrying, that support for the European integration project is at an all time low.

EAPN does not accept the claim that there are no alternatives to these draconian austerity measures. The delegates to the General Assembly called on European leaders to give the European project a new heart by:

1. Putting social and sustainable development and solidarity at the heart of the EU’s priorities and putting human rights at the centre of its efforts to fight against poverty and social exclusion.

2. Setting ambitious and coherent poverty reduction targets, reflecting all three indicators agreed by the European Council (June 2010) and ensuring a rigorous monitoring of progress achieved for all people experiencing poverty including the most disadvantaged. Failure to reach year on year ambitions to reduce poverty must be exposed as unacceptable through this monitoring.
3. Defending and promoting the 'welfare state' and social rights as a necessary prerequisite for economic recovery. Including follow up of the Active Inclusion Recommendation through the adoption of a European Framework Directive on the adequacy of Minimum Income Schemes, measures to support access for all to quality and affordable services of general interest and positive employment activation measures.
4. Defending public common goods (e.g. Water, health, transport, social services) as a fundamental right.
5. Strengthening the real economy, including support for social economy, and comprehensive investment in labour market strategies to create and support quality employment and opportunities for all.
6. Curbing the destructive system of speculative trading, forcing the banking sector to carry its share of the burden and introducing financial transaction taxes to fund social investment as well as to guarantee a high level of transparency in order to counteract corruption.
7. Fighting tax evasion and avoidance including through abolishing tax havens, particularly those established in the European Union territory and pursuing the fight against organized crime more vigorously on a Pan-European level, in order to stamp out these key mechanisms which contribute to the causes of poverty and social exclusion.
8. Creating the conditions which will allow Member States to borrow at reasonable interest rates and promote solidarity throughout the EU.
9. The development of monitoring mechanisms to track trends in wealth and inequality across all Member States in order to promote and implement measures to reduce inequality in incomes and wealth.

Note: The 22nd General Assembly of EAPN took place in Lisbon, Portugal from the 16th to the 18th of June 2011. Delegations from 27 countries and 11 European Organisations took part in the debates and activities. At this General Assembly, the Network welcomed EAPN Networks from: Iceland, Serbia and FYRO Macedonia into its membership.