

Report of the EAPN Training for persons experiencing poverty active in National Networks and EAPN: from personal experience to representing an EAPN agenda

Brussels, September 21-22, 2011

Introduction

On 21-22 September, 29 representatives of EAPN members participated in the training for persons experiencing poverty active in National Networks. This training was organized before the EAPN Conference on the Crisis (22nd afternoon and 23rd September) and all the training participants took active part in the conference as well.

Following a three-year process of developing a strategy to make EAPN a more participative network, during 2011 EAPN has planned and carried out the first training for people living in poverty and social exclusion who have been engaging with National Networks or EAPN Europe. The Participation Strategy will be integrated in the next strategic plan which is to be finalized at the Executive Committee in November, following the General Assembly decision. The training event in 2011 has launched the implementation of this strategy.

Aim

The training event aimed to facilitate the direct involvement of people living in poverty and social exclusion in the work of EAPN and National Networks. The 1 ½ day training has served as an **induction to EAPN, understanding participation in policy-making and tackling barriers to engagement.**

Specific objectives included:

- Exchange on the experiences of national participation
- Presentation of EAPN's mission, vision, values, structures and work
- Building an understanding of policy-making, lobbying and campaigning processes
- Discussing skills necessary to engage with policy making
- Identifying obstacles and solutions to engagement.

Participants profile

National Networks were invited to nominate people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion who :

- Have experience of engaging with the National Network for at least two years
- Have had at least one European participation experience, not counting the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty
- Have an interest in understanding more about how EAPN works as a European network
- Would like to participate more actively in the National and European work of EAPN.

Language and methodology

This training was held in English and French. Three participants received whisper interpretation support from colleagues coming from their Networks.

Given that all participants have prior experience engaging with the work of the Network either at local, national or European levels, the training focused on experiential learning, primarily based on exchange and discussions in small groups, learning from each other's national experiences, comparing own realities with other ones, drawing lessons from specific models.

Session 1: Getting started and introduction to the objectives of the training

The training began with a small *Networking web* to break the ice and get to know each other as well as the kind of connections that participation contributes to.

A short explanation of the objectives and the programme of the training was followed by mapping out the expectations of all the participants as well as more informal introduction through discussion tables.

Expectations Pot

Each participant was invited to share up to three expectations. These expectations can roughly be divided between learning about EU and other countries, learning about participation models and personal roles and expectations related to National level work.

Learning from others and cooperating within EAPN at EU and transnational level

- ⇒ Receive update on work of EAPN and the situation of poverty across Europe
- ⇒ Better knowledge of EAPN
- ⇒ Get practical input about good EAPN projects
- ⇒ Get to know each other better in the EAPN Network
- ⇒ Get inspiration and spirit from each other
- ⇒ Getting to know people and their experiences
- ⇒ Meeting others and learn about their ways of working
- ⇒ To learn new things from the others
- ⇒ Finding out what others are doing to change policies
- ⇒ Get European opinions about poverty
- ⇒ Get a view about the NGOs activities meeting the official governance
- ⇒ Get a realistic schedule of actions and the follow up
- ⇒ Sharing and networking with others
- ⇒ Explanation of how EAPN functions at EU level and how members function indifferent countries
- ⇒ do people experiencing poverty influence the law-making process?
- ⇒ Learn more about how EAPN works
- ⇒ What are the differences of involving people experiencing poverty in the Networks across the EU.
- ⇒ Future of the organisation/Network

Expectations related to learning about National practices

- ⇒ Learn about policies, actions of EAPN National Networks in other countries
- ⇒ To bring these new things and thoughts home and use them in the everyday work of the National Network
- ⇒ Take new ideas home
- ⇒ Learn from everyone's experiences of how to overcome poverty
- ⇒ How to network without resources in the future
- ⇒ Contact and ideas of other Networks on 2020
- ⇒ How can we work more with the other EAPN Networks in Europe
- ⇒ To learn about new ways to tackle poverty and social exclusion and bring that knowledge home

Expectations related to personal role and participation models

- ⇒ Get involved in the work of the Network and to feel more confident as a member
- ⇒ Learn good practice/ideas/inspiration on participation from other Networks
- ⇒ Exchange ideas on how to better engage people with experience of poverty and keep them involved, especially now when cuts are being made
- ⇒ Reflect on participation strategies put in place by other EAPN N. Networks and how they can be used in our country
- ⇒ Our role (of persons experiencing poverty)
- ⇒ Learn from other countries how they involve people experiencing poverty in shaping local social policy and on national level
- ⇒ More cohesion and solidarity for all the people in EU
- ⇒ To see exactly how the information from people experiencing poverty is used in Europe
- ⇒ To know the people involved and have them as friends
- ⇒ The ways to attract people experiencing poverty to participate in other countries
- ⇒ Good practice, new friends and new ideas
- ⇒ Find meaningful ways for participation for more people experiencing poverty
- ⇒ How can I participate in the empowerment of the disadvantaged of the Network

Session 2: learning from each other's National Experiences on participation – the past, present and future of participation in my Network (working in groups)

Letizia Cesarini from **EAPN Italy** made a short presentation of how the Italian Network is building the participation of people experiencing poverty in the Network and in policy making. This was an example to help facilitate discussion and experience sharing in groups.

In Italy the Network began building participation 10 years ago. The reality is that political leaders are not interested in fighting poverty nor in reducing the level of poverty. Therefore there is no national strategy. The reality is, however, very

difficult, many people live precarious lives and that is why CILAP/EAPN Italy focuses on participation as a key approach to fighting poverty.

The Network organizes big meetings, 2-3 large meetings each year bringing together people experiencing poverty, social workers, policy makers and organisations. In these meetings, they discuss problems related to poverty and possible solutions and steps forward.

A second element of the Network's strategy is focus groups, bringing together people suffering from specific issues related to poverty. They work on a document which is then disseminated to all actors. The Delegations to the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty represents lots of different views in Italy each year and the Network tries to involve about 200 people in the preparation of the messages and the National delegation.

Cooperatives are a good way to meet and engage people through the work they do. The Network then identifies persons willing to be more active and works to empower them to be more confident and more active.

Some results from group discussions

Netherlands: In the Netherlands work on participation began in 1994 with a law that requires local authorities to set up and consult welfare claimants' councils. The situation is worse now, it is more difficult to get people involved – these councils get less money, people don't believe in the process and have given up hope. Overall the Network also has fewer activities and fewer people involved. We attend the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty and some community meetings in schools and with politicians. Some of these local meetings have made a difference, people are more aware of the reality of living in poverty. Politicians get a lot of money to represent the people experiencing poverty but they do not do a good job of this.

Ireland: EAPN Ireland has organized participation focus groups in different parts of the country, including in Cork city. These were held in preparation for the National Social Inclusion Forum. The main challenge that the groups felt was lack of feedback after their involvement. Preparation meetings were good but the participants still felt lost.

Hungary: The Network was established in 2004 and it has aimed to build dialogue with decision makers. There was some success with previous governments around this, the Network managed to feed into the Child poverty reduction strategy. People experiencing poverty are involved in managing the Network and all its activities and projects. The current government does not want to address poverty. There is no discussion, there was one meeting with powerpoint presentation, media and politicians were present just as a formality. They talked but did not stay to listen. The Network is now focusing on raising awareness and making poverty more widely known.

Slovenia: There are problems with awareness of poverty, people think poverty exists in Africa but not in Slovenia.

Italy: The Network has difficulties to cope with the demands of EAPN itself. EU policies translate into homework, we write reports that are hidden in drawers. The EU is far away from people's reality. Participation gives leeway into organizations, but the reality on poverty is hidden.

Flemish Network: The Network is formed of 60 organizations where people experiencing poverty take the floor. It is funded by the government and works on 6 topics, with yearly thematic focus. People experiencing poverty play a major role in the Network. They participate in a Flemish forum on poverty, meet different ministers. Unfortunately feedback is not sufficient.

Cyprus: The Network is small and it has problems with participation. We all know each other and if people participate, they express the feeling of being discriminated against and we do not achieve more constant participation which is a shame.

Romania: The Network was founded in 2008 but 2010 was not a good year and at the moment the members are trying to revive it and to build direct participation. Members carry out projects throughout the country involving people living in poverty. The Romanian Network is using the opportunities that EAPN offers in building participation.

Estonia: The Network has similar problems as the Romanian Network does – it has strong members who have big objectives and strategies of their own so they have little time to give to the Network. It is difficult to gather at least once a year, even for medium-sized or big organisations fear losing funding as a result of the crisis.

Positive experience with change in the Network

Finland: The Network invited people with experience of poverty to write letters about their experiences. 1300 letters were collected and analysed. This was the starting point to understand people experiencing poverty and involve them more directly. Meetings were held with the Ministry of Health and the Parliament. The Network has achieved raising the minimum income by 100 Euro.

Germany: The German Network organizes Poverty Conferences which have changed the way policy-making is done. The government has invited for dialogue networks of persons living in poverty. The Network of homeless has managed to convince the government not to move people out of their homes if they have not found another place for them to stay.

Hungary: Every year, the Network writes a monitoring report on the child poverty programme. 50 really poor families report on their experiences. This report goes out to all the political parties and decision-makers.

Poland: The Polish organizations have to cope with a historic reality that there was only one state organization, one trade union etc. Now things have changed, there are many organizations but also many people living in poverty and it's very important to reach to everyone. Need to carry on spreading the message and to build cooperation between people experiencing poverty and experts. Very impressed by the German housing policy change.

Luxembourg: People experiencing poverty are consulted by the network, although they often do not continue to be engaged in these consultation meetings. One achievement is the opening of a social food shop, at the recommendation of people experiencing poverty. This way, people will not be stigmatized.

France: During 2010, the French Government has demanded organizations working with people living in poverty to nominate someone on the committee selecting projects for the year.

Belgium: People experiencing poverty work on several working groups in the Belgian Network and participate in meetings with the government.

Session 3: EAPN's European work – A vision of Social Europe where Everyone enjoys an Adequate Life

Tanya made a short presentation of EAPN European work, including vision, mission, structures and people (See the [presentation](#)). During that input, participants in the training that have been active in EAPN for a long time in various structures, including Letizia Cesarini Sforza, Kart Mere and Paul Dragan, also shared their experience of being part of these structures.

There was a short discussion at the tables about EAPN Europe and how much the participants have been engaged in European work through their Networks. There were various experiences in the group, some having been involved in many initiatives and others not at all.

The second part of the session was spent on learning from other movements. Participants split into groups (including three English speaking and one French speaking) and looked at lessons that we can learn in strengthening the participation of people with direct experience of poverty from:

1. The Trade Union Movement
2. Women's Rights movement
3. US Civil Rights Movement.

It was an opportunity to explore together the time needed for political progress and the real time situation of people living in poverty as well as the power of working together through achievements of other causes. The groups looked one case study and how these relate to our work of building participation? What messages of

support can National Networks give people with direct experience who engage with the work of the Network?

Session 4: EAPN's European work – The work on Minimum Income as an example of engaging with public policy making (continuing previous session)

During the last session of the day, participants explored more in detail the policy work of EAPN, namely the work on Minimum Income. After a [presentation on a brief overview of EAPN's work so far on this topic](#) by Tanya, as well as methods such as reference and standard budgets, learning from ActionAid's global work on local participatory budgeting, participants discussed at their tables the following questions:

- ⇒ An adequate minimum income for everyone? How long will it take to achieve this objective?
- ⇒ How can we motivate people with direct experience to engage in this work?
- ⇒ What support is necessary to move from personal experience to representing the EAPN agenda?
- ⇒ In what way can we connect all the national actions? What power will that bring to us?

Most discussions began with comparing the minimum income schemes in different countries and the government initiatives in this area as well as what the Networks are doing together with people and activists experiencing poverty. There was very rich exchange in the small groups. As it was also the last session of the day, participants also reflected on the whole day's exchange.

Day 2, Session 5: Drawing on personal experience and representing the Network in meeting policy makers: Presentation of 2 National Experiences

The second morning looked more in detail at one model of building direct participation of people and activists experiencing poverty in policy making. Unfortunately Sonja Wallbom from the Swedish Network was not able to attend the meeting, but she had sent a short presentation on [EAPN Sweden building local and regional participation of self-organised groups in the Social OMC process](#), which was given to all participants.

Sarah Welford, from the Scottish Poverty Alliance presented an approach of connecting different groups of people affected by poverty through the [Evidence – Participation – Change \(EPIC\) project](#).

Her presentation focused on specific tools developed under the EPIC project, namely the stakeholder forum and the short life working groups, which are small, are looking at a specific topic, bring views from people who would not have otherwise been involved and develop recommendations for policy makers.

Some of the key learning points from the EPIC project especially related to engaging people with direct experience of poverty include:

- clarity on the purpose of engagement
- equal footing – bringing people at the same level
- feedback
- very little process, strategy, action –focus on specific outcomes from meetings
- celebrate the outcomes
- identify the points that can be followed up and the ones that cannot
- very hard for people to get involved
- achieved changes in the NGO and government attitude towards participative processes
- bringing certain campaigns forward and back on the agenda
- in some areas, the policies and guidelines reflect the recommendations.

Participants found the presentation very inspiring and discussed in groups the difference between this approach and their National Network. Some of the questions explored included:

- ⇒ What elements can we take back?
- ⇒ What role do people experiencing poverty have in these networks and in our network?
- ⇒ How do these approaches compare to what we learned in previous discussions and Network exchanges?

Discussions reflected the difficulty of asking too much of the people to be active in organisations on top of fighting for better living conditions. Feedback, allowing space to leave the process if necessary and clarifying the expectations and points that can be followed up were prioritised in a common reflection on areas that require particular attention from NGOs and governments.

Session 6: Starting from personal experience to representing the interests of people experiencing poverty and their organisations; key lessons from the training

The last session looked at where we are with the representation and the roles that activists with experience of poverty have. What value activists with direct experience bring to the work of National Networks and what are the challenges we are facing today.

In a plenary discussion, participants identified the **challenges to building participation processes**:

- problem with feedback from the National Network
- National and local level key to seeing the impact
- Involvement helped me develop
- Ask a lot of people – need to involve everyone
- Need to manage expectations well and allow for stepping out (to avoid burnout)
- Volunteering is valuable input
- European belonging helps motivate
- Interesting to change between levels – builds awareness of the differences

- Participation gives strength
- Value of European meetings is in inspiring and learning
- Very useful information on National and EU level from other Networks
- inspiration for next steps
- awareness still high on agenda
- at a stage of wanting to take action
- now can we implement the ideas at local level
- motivate people to be active (step by step guide)
- EAPN should build on National Networks to lobby
- Advocating for a better society
- NGOs should not carry poverty- exclusive work, need to challenge quality of participation and power imbalances.

Where we are and what we still need to change in order to stimulate a more active role of activists with direct experience in National Networks:

- activists should manage projects
- lobbying and advocacy roles
- recognising unique place
- members as individuals equal to organisations (EAPN France); they can speak on behalf of the Network; community activists advisory group have one person on the Network's board; communicate on reality of living in poverty
- support self-organizing – platform of people experiencing poverty
- integrate structurally
- improve EU meetings of people experiencing poverty
- awareness-raising
- feedback after actions
- trust and dependence
- worsening political situation relates directly to poverty
- EAPN Networks are different
- Could compare specific policies (for example on housing)
- Autonomous funding for self-organized groups
- Impact of the collapse of Communist welfare.

Key lessons and conclusions from the training:

Compared to EAPN participation meetings in previous years, this was the first meeting that could not involve all Networks that had been interested. Furthermore, most Networks responded to the request on the profile of participants and delegates had a strong activist base around issues of poverty and social exclusion. Most participants had a strong national experience, either coming from participation/consultative structures or working directly on the issue within the members. The methodology used brought the topics as close to practical as possible. These factors together made for very rich exchange in small groups and a high level of satisfaction among the participants.

Participants appreciated highly the presentation of the Poverty Alliance approach which led to exchange on concrete methods of involving people with direct

experience of poverty and building an activist base. Conclusions from the small groups often referred to the following points in the participation-building process:

1. managing expectations, clarifying them from the very beginning of the participative process to the results;
2. seeking as concrete an input from people living in poverty as possible, even when working on broad and multi-dimensional policy approaches;
3. ensuring that the demands on people with direct experience allow them space to withdraw from processes of engagement;
4. ensuring meaningful feedback and follow-up.

When drawing up the profile of an activist with direct experience within EAPN membership, all types of roles had been mentioned. It became therefore clear that EAPN needs to mainstream the participation work in all of its future work and structures. It was agreed that while EAPN's approach has been to build spaces for direct involvement of people experiencing poverty at different levels, it is time to recognise more the value of those people with direct experience who are activists in the fight against poverty and do not only seek their own betterment but the improvement of policies and the conditions for their peers. The involvement of such **activists with direct experience of poverty** from EAPN membership should be made visible in the statutory and working structures of EAPN.

Overall there was a positive evaluation of the training. For a complete synthesis of participant evaluation, as well as of all the documents related to this training and the participation work in EAPN, please refer to the [participation page on EAPN's members' room](#).

For questions on this training and report, please contact tanya.basarab@eapn.eu.

Annex 1: Participant's programme**Wednesday 21 September 2011**

9.30 – 11.00	Welcome and getting to know each other
Session 1	Getting started and introduction to the objectives of the training
9.30 – 10.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Ice breaker ⇒ Welcome and explanation how we will work ⇒ Expectations pot ⇒ Participant's portrait – getting to know each other ⇒ Introduction of the aims of the training and the programme for the two days
10.30 – 11.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Learning from each other's National experiences (the past, present and future of participation in my Network) ⇒ Presentation of a National Network's experience in Plenary and then work in groups
11.00 – 11.30	Break
Session 2	Learning from each other's National experiences on participation – the past, present and future of participation in my Network (working in groups)
11.30 – 13.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Sharing how participation work has started and is happening in National Networks ⇒ Comparing approaches <p>(Some questions to explore in these discussions include: How and when was participation built in my Network? How long has it taken? What are the future steps? How is my Network engaging people with direct experience? What roles people play in the Network, what kind of actions are they part of? How is the participation work in local associations/neighbourhood related to the EAPN work?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ What we learned: roles that people experiencing poverty play in our Networks.
13.00 – 14.30	Lunch
Session 3	EAPN's European work – A vision of Social Europe where Everyone enjoys an Adequate Life
14.30 – 16.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ What is EAPN's European work about (vision, mission, structures and people) short presentation ⇒ Political time versus real time and the power of working together

	Exploring together the time needed for political progress and the real time situation of people living in poverty as well as the power of working together through achievements of other causes (voting rights, women's rights, right to be part of trade unions. How do these relate to our work of building participation? What messages of support can National Networks give people with direct experience who engage with the work of the Network?
16.00 – 16.30	Break
Session 4	<i>EAPN's European work – The work on Minimum Income as an example of engaging with public policy making (continuing previous session)</i>
16.30 – 18.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ An adequate minimum income for everyone? How long will it take to achieve this objective (a short history of EAPN's work so far on this topic – reference and standard budgets, local participatory budgeting, learning from others – ActionAid's global work) ⇒ How can we motivate people with direct experience to engage in this work? ⇒ What support is necessary to move from personal experience to representing the EAPN agenda? ⇒ In what way can we connect all the national actions? What power will that bring to us? <p>Discussion in groups and plenary conclusion</p>
18.00	End of day 1
19.30	Dinner (map in folder)

Thursday, 22 September 2011:

Session 5	<i>Drawing on personal experience and representing the Network in meeting policy makers: Presentation of 2 National Experiences</i>
9.30 – 11.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Presentation by Sonja Wallbom, EAPN Sweden building local and regional participation of self-organized groups in the Social OMC process ⇒ Presentation by Sarah Welford, The Scottish Poverty Alliance connecting different groups of people affected by poverty through the Evidence – Participation – Change (EPIC) project. <p>Discussion in groups (what is different between our National Network and the experiences presented? What elements can we take back? What role do people experiencing poverty have in these networks and in our network? How do these approaches compare to what we</p>

	learned in previous discussions?)
11.00– 11.30	Break
Session 6	<i>Learning from other Networks (continuing group discussion) and conclusions</i>
11.30 – 12.30	<p>⇒ Continuing exchange in groups How do these practices respond to the following questions and how can my NN do it better:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ starting from personal experience to representing the interests of people experiencing poverty and their organizations ○ discussions on the value that people can bring to the work of National Networks ○ what obstacles are there and what can we do to overcome them? <p>⇒ Conclusion</p> <p>Introduction to the afternoon preparatory meeting and the Conference on the following day</p>
12.30 – 14.00	<i>We will walk to the ITUC building and join the other groups for a sandwich lunch</i>
14-17.30	<i>Preparatory afternoon for the EAPN Conference: Getting out of the Crisis together – Alternative Approaches for an Inclusive Recovery</i>

Annex 2: List of participants

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