

**Sharing the power and increasing the ownership –
Strategy for building together a more participative EAPN**

TB/29/10/2010

1. Introduction

European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) includes National Networks and European Organizations that gather NGOs and groups committed to the participation of people experiencing poverty in policy making and works to achieve better policies to combat poverty and social exclusion. The current Strategic Plan (2008-2011) makes increasing participation of people experiencing poverty in the national and European work of EAPN a key priority. Through the continuous involvement in the EU Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty and in the EU Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, EAPN has built models of participation that are now part of its identity. Internal reflections with the members and people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion have highlighted the need to **strengthen the ownership of our work among people experiencing poverty** to better reflect how the work of EAPN connects with the reality of people experiencing poverty and to **improve the internal democracy of EAPN so as to ensure stronger participation.**

The European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion is an important moment to renew EAPN's commitment to the participation of people experiencing poverty and to lay down its objectives and actions for the coming years in a Participation Strategy.

The process of building the participation strategy has involved information gathering and reflection with those responsible for developing participation in the National Networks and with people experiencing poverty engaged in this work. In 2008, EAPN published the book *Small Steps – Big Changes, building the participation of people experiencing poverty* showcasing 10 approaches to engaging people experiencing poverty in projects, policies and organizations by National Networks. Based on these case studies and the experience of EAPN members from all their work, three meetings were held in 2009 to develop ideas on how to engage people experiencing poverty better in national networks and in the EAPN European work.

In April 2009, a seminar was held where persons responsible for participation and people experiencing poverty looked at the benefits, obstacles and conditions for building the participation of people experiencing poverty in EAPN's work. A follow-up meeting held in June 2009 proposed ideas for better participation in EAPN European work. A second follow-up meeting in October 2009 developed ideas for better participation of people experiencing poverty in the National Networks. All the results gathered in this paper will be taken for decision by the Executive Committee, who is responsible for the strategic development of EAPN and is leading the planning of the next EAPN Strategic Plan 2012-2015.

2. Objectives of participation in EAPN

Members of EAPN have generated many approaches to participation and inclusion of people experiencing poverty in organizations, and in policy making. These have helped to develop a common understanding of participation, the benefits it brings and the barriers that people and organizations still face in making it reality. It has also set a framework for significant changes in the next strategic plan period of EAPN.

Participation brings about transformative change whereby resources, services and goods are shared by all. Participation in society and in decisions affecting one's life is the right of every person. EAPN works to ensure that this right is attained by everyone, and especially by people being excluded because they live in poverty. In its work on participation so far EAPN has focused on three approaches:

- creating a space for reality check, where people experiencing poverty and social exclusion give their assessment of how policies are addressing their needs;
- building participation in the National Networks and EAPN European work, ensuring that the people experiencing poverty and their associations have the ownership and drive the work of the network;
- making links between these two approaches, ensuring that participation is a continuous and integrated process in all the work of EAPN and that people experiencing poverty act as representatives of NGOs and are part of the policy-making process.

EAPN has achieved certain progress on all the three approaches and especially on the first one with a more systematic participation of people experiencing poverty in the main EU level forums, including the yearly EU Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty and the Roundtable on Poverty and Social Inclusion. EAPN's reflection has looked primarily at the second approach, i.e. participation of people experiencing poverty in National Networks and EAPN and is the main focus of this strategy.

Since European participation can only happen as a result of strong national participation, EAPN's strategy will focus on two levels:

- A. supporting National Networks in their efforts to become more participative and inclusive of people experiencing poverty; and
- B. facilitating the engagement of people experiencing poverty who are active in National Networks in the European structures and work.

This strategy proposes objectives that will be integrated in the next strategic plan 2012-2015, which will be adopted at the 2011 EAPN General Assembly. In order to achieve important changes regarding the participation of people experiencing poverty in our organizations, this strategy sets ambitious objectives under four main headings:

- 1. Ownership in National Networks**
- 2. Capacity building for more participative networks**
- 3. Developing more inclusive policy making**

4. *Communicating for better participation*

2.1. *Ownership of the work of National Networks*

National Networks bring together small grassroots and large organizations who are directly in contact with different groups of people experiencing poverty. People experiencing poverty bring knowledge and strengths to organizations. Drawing on their knowledge, National Networks translate the reality of people who experience poverty into policy proposals. They also serve as the link between the national and European contexts by bringing the daily struggles of people to European level and by attempting to shape and influence the implementation of EU policies and strategies with the engagement of people experiencing poverty. National Networks work to involve people experiencing poverty in policy consultations and to get public recognition of the importance of participation to eradicating poverty and building an inclusive society.

However, there are still challenges of communication and involvement of people in the daily work of National Networks. All the achievements of National Networks on participation should serve as a basis for building ambitious strategies that will improve the internal democracy of the National Networks and their members.

Objectives

- (1) Develop participation strategies with focus on organizational change, more participative methodologies, more diverse membership and more inclusive decision-making structures
- (2) Support the development and inclusion in the Network of self-organized groups
- (3) Develop participative working methods and capacity building tools to foster engagement of people experiencing poverty in policy making, advocacy and lobby work
- (4) Build on the involvement in all the European and national level participation processes and meetings
- (5) Improve the internal communication and involve people experiencing poverty in this process.

2.2. *Capacity building support for more participative networks*

Members are taking a more active stand on participation in the EAPN meetings, calling for a strategy and more tools to support National Networks in their initiatives. The link between the internal reflections of EAPN and the conclusions of the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty is becoming stronger in some National Networks and is gaining more visibility inside EAPN.

Each member Network can nominate persons on the working groups and the Executive committee of EAPN and a bigger number of delegates to the General Assembly. Members are free to choose how to select these persons, and it is important to note that people nominated by National Networks on the working

structures of EAPN include people who have lived in poverty or are still experiencing poverty.

Among the obstacles to engage in the European work of EAPN, members mention the difficulty to understand processes and to engage with such a technical language. People experiencing poverty demand that EAPN be more visible and that discussions start from the daily struggles and be turned into policy proposals. While this change will happen in long-term, EAPN is looking at what resources and support it can provide to Network at this stage.

Objectives

- (1) Support National Networks become more participative
- (2) Provide support to persons experiencing poverty starting to engage with EAPN's policy making work
- (3) revise the training strategy to support the work on participation
- (4) lobby for more public funding on participation and assess how effectively are funds on participation in policy making spent
- (5) Develop methods and gather and disseminate good practices for participation in organizations
- (6) Review EAPN's organizational structure eliminate obstacles and foster the participation of people experiencing poverty as NGO representatives in decision-making

2.3. Developing more inclusive policy making

Gathering a broad range of organizations and networks working on poverty and social exclusion, EAPN is recognized as a key stakeholder in policy making. EAPN policy recommendations are a combination of statistical evidence and examples of people's daily reality pointing to the gaps in public policies and proposing ways to improve them. All of this work is developed in working groups where National Networks nominate people to serve as the link between the work done at national and European levels.

In the framework of the EU Social Inclusion and Social Protection Strategy EAPN continuously lobbies for the involvement of people experiencing poverty and their organizations in the governance process of the Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC), particularly in the design, delivery and evaluation of the National Action Plans on Inclusion and in the yearly Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion. Similar demands are made by National Networks about national policymaking processes.

The main challenges that EAPN will have to address is how to transform the current policy-making framework and methods into more participative and inclusive ones, where people experiencing poverty participate in consultations, in developing policies, in advocating for change and in meeting decision-makers as representatives of EAPN or National Networks.

Objectives

- (1) include more people experiencing poverty directly in policy working groups on a permanent basis
- (2) develop tools and working methods to support National Networks improve participation in policy-making
- (3) implement new participative policy-making methods (such as budget standards or participatory budgeting) and promote their use by decision-makers
- (4) lobby policy makers to reform current governance models to include more participation mechanisms with people experiencing poverty through their organizations
- (5) work with academics and other actors to open up policy making to people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

2.4. Communicating for better participation

EAPN communicates its demands to policy makers and to society through its on-going lobby work as well as through the campaigning activities. In 2007, EAPN decided to become a more campaigning organization and began working on two campaigns. The first one, on the EU We Want has generated the EAPN's position for the EU Year 2010. The Outcomes of this work have been taken up in the EU We Can Trust document which includes EAPN's vision of the kind of society we would like to live in and is the basis for EAPN's proposals to the future Europe 2020 Strategy. The second one is an on-going Campaign for an Adequate Minimum Income which is now entering its 3rd phase. These campaigns target decision-makers as well as society at large. The messages from the EU Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty have become an important part of EAPN's arguments for better policies to combat poverty. The channelling of direct messages from people experiencing poverty in the policy making makes EAPN a credible and reliable partner to policy makers.

In addition to external communication, internally EAPN is constantly improving its communication tools for members. Contextualizing and explaining better the policy making processes, communicating to members the importance of engaging with policy and developing arguments together are some of the current challenges. Finding the place for people experiencing poverty, involving them in the development and implementation of new communication tools, in the advocacy and lobby process will strengthen EAPN's vision and messages.

Objectives

- (1) Continue producing explainers that help grassroots organizations and people engage with policy-making and lobby work
- (2) Develop user-friendly documents linking EU policies to local realities
- (2) Improve the image of people experiencing poverty in the media
- (3) Make better use of testimonies in external communication
- (4) Work with the media to attack stereotypes and improve the image of people experiencing poverty in society

(5) Support National Networks on working with the media at national, regional and local level.

Annex

The vision, values and principles of EAPN coming from its Strategic Plan and the founding documents lay the foundation for the participation strategy.

Vision

The European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) is working for a Social Europe free of poverty and social exclusion with access to economic, social and cultural rights for all. To achieve this we seek a fair distribution of wealth, accessible quality employment, high levels of social protection, the combat of discrimination and the meaningful participation -through the organisations in which they participate- of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

EAPN works to achieve its vision among others by empowering people living in poverty and social exclusion and by lobbying for and with them for a Social Europe we can trust.

EAPN Values

- EAPN believes that poverty and social exclusion are a denial of fundamental human rights and thus a failure to respect and protect human dignity
- EAPN believes that poverty and social exclusion arise from complex and multidimensional processes that cannot be dealt with in isolation or on the margins.
- EAPN believes in the possibility to achieve a better sharing of wealth, opportunities and resources.
- EAPN believes in gender equality.
- EAPN believes in respect for cultural and religious diversity and non-discrimination on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation or social origin.
- EAPN believes in the richness of language diversity in the European Union.
- EAPN believes in the organisation of our work in a democratic and transparent way, which respects the different specific tasks of the different bodies that make up the Network.
- EAPN believes that people have the right to influence and participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their views and experiences listened to and acted on.
- EAPN believes that particular measures are needed to empower people experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequalities and to ensure that their 'voice' is heard in policy making, policy implementation and policy evaluation.
- EAPN believes in seeking to work in partnership with other actors sharing a common vision including actors within; state authorities, public sector bodies, European Union Institutions and with trade unions and employers and with other NGOs.

- EAPN believes in the independence of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and believes that public authorities have a responsibility to create and adhere to frameworks which respect the independence of NGOs.

Networking Principles of EAPN, adopted at the founding General Assembly of EAPN in 1990

1. The network shall primarily be an expression of people and groups fighting against poverty to influence and effect change in the social, economic and political structures that presently hold people in a marginal position throughout the European Communities. It shall be as open and inclusive as possible in order to give greatest access to people in poverty.
2. In order to achieve maximum effectiveness, the network must clearly determine those organizations, groups and individuals which it intends to influence and/or work with. It is vital that this takes account of the importance of both the European Communities and member State focus.
3. The membership needs to be broadly-based and explicitly committed to combating poverty and social exclusion in accordance with the first principle.
4. Recognizing that women who are experiencing poverty are doubly disadvantaged because of their sex, they must be encouraged and enabled to be active at all levels in the operation of the network.
5. People are discriminated against on the basis of their race or ethnic background and due care must be taken to eliminate all such prejudice and facilitate their full participation in the network.
6. Specific forms of membership must be drawn from:
 - i. geographically distinct areas of extreme poverty;
 - ii. groups, projects, organizations which tackle the causes of poverty and which seek to reduce dependence in communities;
 - iii. groups, associations which seek to address the underlying policy issues of poverty (allocation of resources, legislation etc.);
 - iv. groups defending vulnerable minorities or people at risk, e.g. travelers, the isolated elderly,...
7. The network must build appropriate structures to ensure that it is accountable to its members particularly those experiencing poverty and social exclusion.
8. Structures and funding of the network should reflect a commitment to redress the imbalance created by peripherality at a European and national level.
9. Professionals within the network should make it a target to encourage involvement at committee level within the network, and in

leadership/representation, those people experiencing poverty and ensure the appropriate structures be devised at all levels to effect this.

10. If the barriers to participation are to be seriously countered, the relevant training and support must be devised to effect this.
11. The network should always be fully resourced at national and European level in order to achieve the aims and objectives to maximum effect. This must specifically redress the structural exclusion of those living in poverty.
12. The interests of countries, regions or groups which differ from the interests of the larger or majority countries, regions or groups must be reflected in policy statements.