



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

EAPN's Key Messages

3rd Annual Convention on Poverty and Social Exclusion

BRUSSELS, 26-27 NOVEMBER, 2013

Ending Poverty is a real Political Choice!

EAPN calls for the Convention to go back to basics –

Concrete action to reach the poverty target reviewed by a yearly hearing with people experiencing poverty!

This 3rd Annual Convention must focus on its first objective: reviewing the progress on the poverty target and proposing concrete solutions. **No progress has been made towards the target, and poverty has increased by 6 million since 2010 to the shocking figure of 120 million people at risk of poverty or exclusion.** More worryingly, EU and national policies are increasingly seen by people facing poverty and EAPN members as *contributing to this increase*. This is an enormous risk to the European Social Model – but also to support for more European integration.

The EAPN Assessment of the NRPs and NSRs 2013 – *Widening the Gap*, sent a clear message: EU **macroeconomic priorities and governance focused on austerity, are contributing to increasing poverty and widening inequality** between rich and poor people *and* regions, with severe social disinvestment, particularly in countries under Troika programming arrangements.

Furthermore, there is a continuing **loss of participation of people experiencing poverty and their NGOs** in the Europe 2020 strategy as part of structured stakeholder engagement. This is jeopardizing effectiveness and accountability. It reduces the quality of institutional knowledge about the problems of those millions of people living lives of quiet desperation and limits institutional awareness of potential policy options and priorities. This has endangered continuing support for the strategy from those with any interest in supporting the strategy and more broadly, EU engagement in the social dimension of policy.

The **new Annual Growth Survey 2014** has missed a key opportunity to restore EU credibility by refocusing on Europe 2020 and its targets (particularly the poverty and other social targets) and insisting on coherent integrated strategies, as called for in the EAPN Letter to President Barroso (Oct 4th). The proposal to strengthen national stakeholder engagement is welcome, but it should provide an effective mechanism for productive dialogue upstream of policy decisions as well as implementation and monitoring.

To ensure rapid progress to the target this Convention must get back to basics. There must be real, ongoing engagement of all stakeholders in a formal advisory mechanism that has the capacity to drive progress. Democracy, social justice and the future of the EU, require all participants to strive to put people experiencing poverty and disadvantage – their concerns and their solutions, at the heart of policy-making.

THREE KEY MESSAGES

- 1. Make concrete steps towards Social Europe and the social dimension of EMU according to a timetable which recognizes the urgency of the social situation.*
- 2. Launch an EU Integrated Strategy to fight poverty and social exclusion, using social investment to drive the economy as well as society.*
- 3. Provide financial and political support for an Annual Hearing in EP between people experiencing poverty and EU institutions. It should review progress on the poverty target and more widely, measures to enhance social justice.*

1. Concrete steps towards a coherent strategy for a socially just and economically productive Europe and Social Dimension of EMU

The poverty target will not be reached unless the overarching EU policy frame is made social as well as economic, and the economic made social. The EU must make concrete progress towards Social Europe, if it is to progress towards a coherent social and sustainable vision, which can muster the support of many ordinary citizens. Macroeconomic goals must contribute to social objectives (including the poverty target), rather than undermining them in a race to the bottom. Reducing risk of poverty and concrete progress towards EU social standards supports an optimistic, knowledge-intensive, high-productivity Europe of good jobs and good lives for EU citizens. Thus is the Europe we all want.

The new Commission Communication '*Social Dimension of the EMU*' can contribute, through embedding social scoreboards and indicators in the macroeconomic imbalances procedure. But these will not be effective unless there is political will to ensure that the social impact of macroeconomic policies is assessed before policy decisions are taken. The Europe 2020 process must also reflect this shared social priority.

Concrete Actions:

- **Demand obligatory SIA assessment of all** measures proposed as part of fiscal consolidation, the macroeconomic surveillance procedures, and in the Troika Programmes.
- **Assign priority in Europe 2020 AGS to poverty reduction, guaranteeing CSRs for all countries not making progress on the poverty target.**
- **Make meaningful, timetabled progress on measures towards EU Social Standards:** with tangible progress towards an EU Directive guaranteeing an Adequate Minimum Income, as part of a universal social protection system, as well as common principles for consensualized reference budgets. This will also support aggregate demand and therefore the EU economy.

2. An EU Integrated Strategy to fight poverty and social exclusion, with social investment as an instrument, not a replacement.

Progress on the poverty target cannot be made without explicit EU and national integrated strategies. The Social Open Method of Co-ordination has drawn together vital social learning over the last 10 years, demonstrating the effectiveness of an overarching integrated, multidimensional strategy to combat poverty, based on prevention as well as alleviation and rooted in access to rights, resources and services. (Common Objectives 2010). Specific integrated strategies for key at-risk groups and themes, need to be nested within an overarching strategy of reducing population risk of poverty. Integrated Active Inclusion is an important element, but needs to be broadened and deepened in the scope of its measures. Young and older people not of working age must also be a focus for active inclusion.

The Social Investment Package can play a crucial role, with its understanding of effective social policy as an investment rather than a deadweight cost. The package is an instrument to help deliver on an integrated strategy to fight poverty and disadvantage. It is not a substitute for general and fundamental social protection, which enables people to take risks, bounce back from loss or failure and engage with their future.

Concrete Actions:

- **Launch a consultation process, both at European and national level, assuring an enlarged participation of stakeholders, particularly those facing poverty and social exclusion, to develop an EU integrated strategy that is focused on reaching the poverty reduction target, ensuring access to rights, resources and services.**

- **Enforce ambitious poverty reduction targets, and sub-targets in Europe 2020. For example child poverty reduction must be delivered through integrated strategies that focus on the child as a whole and vital person living in a concrete context.**
- **Confirm Social Investment, including in social protection, as a key tool to support the strategy, developing concrete road maps for implementation of the core integrated sub-strategies – Investing in children, tackling homelessness, Roma Inclusion and integrated Active Inclusion.**
- **An ex-conditionality requirement for anti-poverty strategies in Structural Funds is one source of implementation.**

3. Commit to Annual Hearings in the European Parliament between EU institutions and participation of people experiencing poverty

In the first days of the Social OMC, the direct engagement of people experiencing poverty was seen as crucial by EU institutions as well as civil society actors, to build effective solutions and get ownership of a genuine strategy to fight poverty. In the EPAP Communication, direct participation was also made a key objective and commitment to engage disadvantaged people as stakeholders in the Europe 2020 process. Although some participation of people in poverty has been facilitated in the Convention, it is not enough to replace the force and direct leverage of face-to-face meetings organized by people with direct experience. Let's demonstrate a fitting result to the European Year putting active citizenship in practice – starting here!

Concrete Actions:

- **Make a concrete commitment to finance a high-profile yearly hearing with EU Institutions in the European Parliament where people experiencing poverty can review progress on the poverty target within a bottom-up approach (from the regional and national level to the European one).**
- **Ensure that Recommendations are transmitted to the Council and integrated into the Annual Convention and that people with direct experience are treated with respect as what they really are: experts by experience.**
- **Require MS to support national anti-poverty networks involving people with direct experience of poverty, to engage in the European Semester/Europe 2020.**

See EAPN publications, activities and contacts on: www.eapn.eu

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

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For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=327&langId=en>

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