

Europe 2020: National Pilot Actions (6.000 Euros)

Final Report

EAPN Ireland

1. Introduction

The pilot project aimed to increase awareness among politicians, media and civil society of the commitments in Europe 2020 and the Platform against Poverty, at EU and Irish levels, as they relate to poverty in Ireland, the current issues for people in poverty and the measures needed to impact on them.

The context for the project was Ireland's emergence from the Troika programme and its fuller participation in the Semester process since 2014. There is a need to put the achievement of Ireland's poverty target at the centre of this agenda and to make EAPN Ireland members more aware of the workings and implications of the Semester. There is also the need to build on the work of the Better Europe Alliance which was funded by the European Commission as part of the EU Semester Alliance project in 2014, and which continued with a lower capacity in 2015.

The political context in Ireland of a general election in 2015 is an important opportunity to influence policy. The project aimed to highlight the specific commitments Ireland has to poverty reduction under the Europe 2020 strategy and the policy measures needed to achieve this. It would provide the policy material and lobbying opportunities for EAPN Ireland and their allies to put this issue on the political agenda.

This will be achieved through raising awareness through briefings on the Poverty Target at EU and Irish levels among politicians and civil society, discussing with political parties, and briefing Irish anti-poverty NGOs about the National Reform Programmes, Country-Specific Recommendations and Mid-Term review of Europe 2020 and the Semester more generally.

The specific activities to be carried out under the project included:

- i. Short briefing for EAPN Ireland members and other civil-society groups on understanding and engaging with Europe 2020 and the Semester more broadly.
- ii. Briefing on Europe 2020 poverty target and its roll-out in Ireland, disseminated to members of Parliament, key advisors, local councillors and civil society.
- iii. Meetings with all parties about their election manifestos.

2. Description of activities carried out

i. Briefing on Europe 2020 and the European Semester

A Briefing on Europe 2020 and the European Semester was completed and disseminated widely in early September. This briefing looks at the European Semester and the Europe 2020 semester, informing readers how it works. It specifically highlights the EU and national commitments to poverty reduction and provides an update on progress towards these. It also presents the 2015 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland as well as some information on a number of relevant EU policy developments including on President Juncker's Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change, the EU Investment Plan, Ireland's Structural and Investments Fund Programme for 2014-2020 and the 5 Presidents Report on Completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union.

This briefing updates and adds to the Briefing published by the Better Europe Alliance (Irish Semester Alliance) in 2014.

The briefing was disseminated through EAPN Ireland's Flash e-newsletter which goes to over 1,000 recipients including all members of the Irish Parliament.

The Briefing was also the basis for an EAPN Ireland input at a workshop for NGOs on the European Semester which was organised by the European Movement in Ireland on the 22nd September. This was alongside inputs from the European Commission's European Semester Officer in Ireland and the Irish representative on the European Economic and Social Committee.

- Briefing is available at <http://www.eapn.ie/eapn/briefing-on-poverty-targets-european-semester-and-europe-2020>
- The Flash e-newsletter is available at <http://www.eapn.ie/eapn/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/EAPN-Ireland-Newsflash-September-2015.pdf>

ii. Briefing on poverty, 2015 and proposals for 2016-2021

A Briefing on poverty, 2015 and proposals for 2016-2021 was published in December 2015. This briefing outlines Ireland's and the EU's poverty reduction targets and progress in meeting them as well as highlighting what poverty and social exclusion mean in reality across a range of different issues. In the context of calling for a five year strategy to address poverty and it then presents a range of proposals for policies that need to be addressed if poverty is to be addressed. These are presented in the context of influencing the policy priorities of political parties in the run up to the national elections in early 2015.

The briefing is available at: <http://www.eapn.ie/eapn/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/EAPN-Ireland-briefing-on-poverty-2015.pdf>

This briefing is being used to influence political parties in the run up to the general elections in 2015. This is to be achieved through direct engagement with those preparing the manifestos for the parties but also through providing clear and understandable information

to EAPN Ireland members and others who can use the information throughout the election campaign as they meet and seek to influence the policies that will inform the next term of government.

The Briefing was disseminated widely by email to all contacts in the EAPN database who receive our Flash newsletter. This includes all members of the Irish Dáil (Parliament), officials in Government Departments, MEPs, EAPN Ireland members and organisations working to address poverty and social exclusion. The Briefing was also sent to those drafting the election manifestos of the different political parties.

The initial plan was to post hard copies of the Briefing to Members of Parliament but it agreed as part of the project to send copies to email and to follow up at a later date with hard copies as engagement with political parties takes place.

iii. Meetings with all parties about their election manifestos

This part of the project involves meeting with those involved in drafting the manifestos of the different political parties in the run up to the 2015 elections.

The first meeting took place in late November with the representative for the Labour Party. This activity has started later than expected and so is ongoing and will be completed in early 2016.

iv. Building on the work of the Better Europe (Semester) Alliance

In 2014 Ireland received support from the European Commission through the EU Alliance for a Democratic, Social and Sustainable European Semester. Through this EAPN Ireland convened and coordinated the Better Europe Alliance. Although Commission support for the Better Europe Alliance ended in 2014 the Alliance has continued to work, under the coordination of EAPN Ireland, albeit on a reduced capacity. The activities for the Alliance during 2015 were as follows:

- July 2015: Response to the 2015 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland.
- October 2015: Meeting with European Commission's European Semester Officers to present the Response
- October 2015: Meeting with the Parliament's Joint Committee on EU Affairs to present the Response
- November 2015: Meeting with the European Commission's fact-finding mission to Ireland on the European Semester

The Alliance Response to the 2015 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland is available here: <http://www.eapn.ie/eapn/response-to-2015-country-specific-recommendations-for-ireland>

3. Evaluation of results and impact

i. Provision of accessible information on the European Semester, Europe 2020 and poverty

There is a clear deficit of information in Ireland on the relevance of the European process for people, and in particular in relation to how it addresses poverty. This project went some way to addressing this deficit. The two briefings produced by the project provided clear and accessible information for EAPN Ireland members, our allies and for those involved in influencing and making policy.

ii. Influencing the political priorities of political parties and the next Government

It is still early to evaluate the impact of this project on the manifestos and political priorities of the next Government as the manifestos will only be published closer to the election and the programme for government as the next Government is being formed. EAPN Ireland will continue to engage with the political parties throughout this process and assess the impact of this engagement as the documents and priorities become clear.

It is important to highlight that the poverty briefing and proposals for the manifestos of political parties are a resource for our members and others to use in the election process so that the impact is multiplied.

4. Learning points and future recommendations

Access to the resources for this project was important for EAPN Ireland and welcome. It allowed us to produce materials and be visible in a way which would be very difficult without it. This has been very important at this moment in the run up to the general elections in Ireland, allowing us to produce and disseminate information that can have an impact on the direction of policy which can help prevent and reduce poverty. This was also the experience under the Better Europe Alliance where resources allowed the Alliance to develop a strong capacity to engage with the Semester process and to support other to understand its relevance and develop their own knowledge.

We would recommend that where possible this support for projects continues in the future. Additional resources from the European Commission to support such work at national level would be an important contribution to this e.g. through the European Semester Officers.