

NGOs' expectations and activities for the

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This article provides the perspective of NGOs working with people experiencing poverty on the 2010 Year Against Poverty, highlighting their expectations as well as tools and actions planned for the Year.

EAPN, a network of organisations fighting poverty and social exclusion across the European Union, has been promoting a European Year Against Poverty and Social Inclusion since 2004. Why? What are the expectations? Will it really make a difference?

Many NGOs have already been involved with previous European Years, such as the 1997 Year against Racism, the 2003 Year of People with Disabilities, or the 2007 Year of Equal Opportunities for All. Aiming primarily at raising awareness and launching public debates, these Years also led to major political developments, such as the Directive on the fight against racism in the workplace. For NGOs there are two main objectives for 2010: awareness raising about the causes and effects of poverty and social exclusion and creating a strong message for the outcomes of the Year.

Good, or bad, timing, at a critical turning point for Europe?

The timing of the Year is crucial: 2010 is the date by which the EU had committed itself to making a decisive impact on poverty and social exclusion. 2010 marks the end of the Lisbon strategy and hard decisions are needed to ensure that 'post Lisbon' will increase rather than decrease support for the fight against poverty and social exclusion at European level, but also at national and local level. 2010 also marks a renewal in the European institutions: a new European Parliament was elected in June 2009, and a new Commission is expected by early 2010. Finally, last but not least, by cruel coincidence 2010 also arrives amidst a global economic and social crisis.

Expectations from the ground

2010 is the opportunity for the focus of Europe, its people and its institutions to be targeted on poverty and social exclusion. The crisis, which has accentuated the problems, provides no excuse to avoid addressing the worsening situation: the situation of those already experiencing poverty and social exclusion is worsening. They are now joined in many countries by those who had escaped poverty earlier and who now find themselves without work, basic services, or homeless, due to cutbacks in many countries. A European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion has become more relevant than ever before. NGOs have high hopes that this year will give them the chance to highlight the conditions that lead to poverty and social exclusion, and to draw attention to key issues which need to be addressed to remedy these conditions. Above all they wish to see change.

And on the ground, what is the reality on the eve of 2010?

The decision establishing the European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion was adopted in October 2008. It was followed by the publication by the European Commission of a Strategic Framework Document giving concrete guidelines to Member States. The message to the Member States was clear: the guidelines include guidance on accessibility (to information and funding for example), on the participation of people experiencing poverty, on partnership with civil society and stakeholder involvement, and gender mainstreaming.

Whilst NGOs and their members across Europe are seizing the opportunity to organise events to mark the Year, at national level the effect of the Strategic Guidelines is mixed so far. For example in some countries, where contact with the NIB (National Implementing Body for the European Year) is more problematic, NGOs have difficulty in becoming involved in national consultations about the Year and in accessing information about the national programme for the Year or about the call for proposals in their country.

Elsewhere, national programmes have been developed in close cooperation with NGOs from the start, and information about calls for proposals has circulated freely, and on time. For example, in Hungary the Anti Poverty Network put forward a programme for the Year which has mostly been taken into account in the programme of the NIB. In Austria and Belgium the Anti Poverty Networks have also been in close contact with the ministry preparing the national programmes from the start. The process itself of preparing national programmes has in some cases led to stronger links with relevant ministries, sometimes for the first time.

NGOs form a coalition at European level

Giving meaning to the Year means creating an outcome. At European level NGOs have come together to make sure that the Year marks progress in social Europe. Coordinated by EAPN, the European Anti Poverty Network, they have decided that to work together will be the best way to ensure the best chance to make an impact across the different sectors. They have formed the EY2010 NGO Coalition, coordinated by EAPN through a Steering Group to share activities and to draft joint messages for the outcomes of 2010. Our shared demands include:

- an awareness-raising campaign on the **structural causes of poverty** and the role of the state in the realisation of **economic and social rights for all**;

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2010 Year: Building a Europe for All

European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)

- **financial investment** at local, national and EU levels to achieve enhanced **dialogue** with people in poverty and anti poverty NGOs;
- a strong **political legacy from 2010**, to include a new overarching and sustainable EU strategy based on fundamental rights, a revitalised EU Social Inclusion strategy which ensures progress on agreed national and EU poverty targets, progress in relation to the accessibility and affordability of services of general interest and a framework directive aimed at achieving real progress on the adequacy and accessibility of minimum income schemes;
- an **EU poverty programme and the use of structural funds** to underpin EU commitments to fight poverty and social exclusion.

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- **The European Year NGO Communications Experts Advisory board:** this is where NGOs have opportunities for direct interaction with the communications campaign. The Commission's communications campaign also plans **Focus Groups** of people experiencing poverty in five member states.

- Awareness raising means examining the stereotypes that are

associated with those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. This is why the Commission has organised a **media event on 'Poverty between reality and perceptions: the communication challenge'** on 28-29 October, gathering journalists, NGOs and people experiencing poverty.

Cooperation at local level

At local level NGOs are planning activities, cultural events, meetings and awareness raising events. The variety is widespread. Coordinating this means sharing information: this is one of the objectives of the EY 2010 NGO coalition at European level. What is the tool we use? A

shared website, and a common identity: the "END POVERTY - Building a Europe for all" logo.

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Funding for NGO activities at national level is included in many, but not all, of the national programmes for the European Year. Whilst being aware that decisions in some cases may not be finalised until well into 2010, NGOs are moving forward with their plans, with the uncertainty of funding possibilities ever present.

Working with the European Commission

EAPN has tried to ensure that the Year is prepared in close collaboration with NGOs from the start. In the event a number of structures are now in place, where NGOs are present, though they have not been included in the overall planning and management of the Year:

- **The European Year EU Stakeholders Expert Group** provides a gathering for all those concerned with the European Year to gather and exchange information. This is the main tool for consultation with the Commission and takes place at six monthly intervals, bringing together NGOs, regions, and international bodies, such as the Council of Europe.
- **The European Year Consultative Committee** consists primarily of the National Implementation Bodies (NIBs). NGOs have been invited to speak to the NIBs during these meetings, and have called for closer cooperation at national level between NIBs and NGOs.

Tools for NGOs during 2010

On behalf of the NGO coalition we are developing tools to increase participation in the Year at local and national level.

- **The NGO Website** - available at www.endpoverty.eu as from December 2009 - will include pages 'About the Year', about the coalition, using the NGO EY2010 logo, country information, taking action, a joint calendar, and stories of people experiencing poverty.
- **The Media guide**, put together by EAPN, will give guidance to NGOs to help them achieve the objectives of the year, such as running an information campaign, preparing press releases, organising a press conference etc, but also information relating to the European Year, such as key events, National Implementing Bodies, and the national correspondents of the European Year communications campaign.

Visibility during the year

As well as the many campaigns and activities during the Year at national level, NGOs at European level are planning highlights which they hope will be reflected at local, national and European levels.

- **National Focus Weeks** for the Year have been named in most Member States. NGOs plan to work with their respective NIBs and other national partners to attract the spotlight onto a country during a week throughout the Year.
- The **Spring European Focus Week** (24-30 May) will aim to encourage broadcasting companies across Europe to focus on issues of poverty and social exclusion. This is the occasion for NGOs, and the people experiencing poverty that many of them work with at local level, to be consulted, drawing on EAPN's experience of working with people living in situations of poverty during the annual meetings of People Experiencing Poverty.

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- Around the International Day of Poverty, on 17 October, the **October European Focus Week** (11-17 October) will be organised culminating in a human ring around the European institutions in Brussels (Commission, Parliament, Council, Committee of the Regions, etc.). The aim is to gather thousands of participants to draw attention to a message about the Europe we want. Far from shutting in thousands of workers in the European Parliament, we will invite them to join us in building a better Europe for all. Rendez-vous around the institutions in October.

The questions will remain at the end of the Year, once the formal closing has taken place in Brussels in November 2010, whether the Year really has had an impact on social policy in the EU. Will those suffering from poverty feel less isolated? Will their voice have been heard?

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De-linking migration control procedures to the access of basic social services is a key factor in preventing social exclusion of undocumented migrants. Local actors need to be better informed about undocumented migrants' entitlement to basic social rights and discouraged from implementing arbitrary barriers at the procedural level. The EU and its Member States need to increase protection mechanisms for undocumented migrants suffering from exploitation, abuse and violence, and improve their access to justice. Finally, there is an urgent need to support civil society organisations working to protect undocumented migrants at the local, national and European levels - the negative and criminalising discourse regarding irregular migrants poses a huge barrier to their humanitarian work and they are under increased threat of penalisation.

The EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process has the potential to challenge the notion that certain segments of the population, due to their irregular status, are undeserving of basic social protections. Inclusion of undocumented migrants as a specific target group in this process would be a welcome step towards fighting the marginalisation and exclusion of a very vulnerable segment of the population in contemporary Europe.

Announcements

- ENAR has published a report entitled "The EU Lisbon Treaty: What implications for anti-racism?". It is available at www.enar-eu.org/Page.asp?docid=15845&langue=EN
- ENAR has published a study entitled "The social and employment dimensions of the EU's Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs", available at www.enar-eu.org/Page.asp?docid=15845&langue=EN
- ENAR issued two policy responses, on the EU Stockholm Programme for Justice and Home Affairs and on the European Fundamental Rights Agency's 2009 Annual Report. They are both available at www.enar-eu.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=15288&langue=EN
- ENAR has launched its 2008 national shadow reports on racism. The European report will be launched on 3 December 2009. The reports are available at www.enar-eu.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=15294&langue=EN
- The next edition of ENARgy will be published in February 2010. Information on previous editions is available at www.enar-eu.org/Page.asp?DocID=15292&langue=EN

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ENAR is a network of European NGOs working to combat racism in all EU member states. Its establishment was a major outcome of the 1997 European Year Against Racism. ENAR aims to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, to promote equality of treatment between EU citizens and third country nationals, and to link local/regional/national initiatives with European initiatives. ENAR's vision is of a world free from racism.



This newsletter was produced with the financial support of the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Articles published in ENARgy do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of ENAR or of the European Commission.

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