



Hamburg, den 28.2.2013

Report of the German National Poverty Conference (nak) 2013

In 2013, the German National Poverty Conference (nak) was represented by four new spokesmen: Joachim Speicher (speaker), Kurt Klose, Werena Rosenke and Michael David (deputy speakers). The office of PARITÄTISCHER Wohlfahrtsverband Hamburg e.V. (Sylke Känner, Christian Böhme and Manuela Bluhm) supported the nak spokesmen. In 2013, activities to raise nak's profile, which had already been started in previous years, have been further expanded.

nak contributes substantially to political and professional discussions. It ensures that a nationwide network is in place which includes professional approaches and the perspectives of those affected at the same time. nak speaks out on poverty issues and acts based on this.

In 2013, nak started a close cooperation with the German Institute for Human Rights, which led to joint events (e.g. an event on the impact on human rights by the European debt cap, in cooperation with the Viadrina School of Governance, Berlin) and conference contributions (focus on the nak delegates' conference). An important basis of nak's declarations is the description of and demand for social human rights. In addition, in 2013 nak started a process to further develop its self-conception within the network in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy and the participation of people experiencing poverty.

Establishing a New Task Force 'Participation'

Due to the intense and critical reflection of the previous meetings of people experiencing poverty (see also Report on the 8th Meeting, in 2013), nak created a new task force 'Participation' in 2013. Members of the task force are people experiencing poverty who are members of nak organizations. The office of the PARITÄTISCHER Wohlfahrtsverband Hamburg e.V. supports the organization process of the task force. The task force pursues two main objectives:

- 1) A basic reflection of how nak and its members understand and define participation
- 2) The advancement of the national meeting of people experiencing poverty.

The task force is meeting for the first time at the beginning of 2014.

Poverty and Participation

Tax cuts in conjunction with the debt cap compromise the financial basis of the welfare state. The infrastructure regulated by the welfare state and necessary social benefits must not be replaced by charity. Fundamental social rights ought to be secured and implemented through state action. The municipalities and the local social infrastructure, which ensure or enhance opportunities to participate, have to be financed adequately. Since the beginning of 2013 the spokesmen of nak have

intensively been working on the subject "Strengthening the Financial Base of the Welfare State". Together with nak members they drafted a position paper at the end of 2013. It will serve as a topic of a symposium and of political discussions in 2014.

In 2012 and 2013 nak developed the discussion paper "Social Participation and Minimum Subsistence Level". In 2014 it will be the subject of parliamentary discussions. For the majority of recipients the social benefits called "Hartz IV" are neither a temporary nor a primary labour market related benefit. Contributions to social participation, which cannot be measured by labour market success indicators, are needed. In the paper, people experiencing poverty described social benefits and the necessity to advance them in positive terms with regards to them ensuring social participation.

In 2013, nak was part of the "Alliance for a Minimum Subsistence Level" and also worked with groups of unemployed people who were not part of nak. The alliance did public relations work in order to determine basic provision levels that would take real circumstances and real needs into account. According to the calculations of the alliance, the basic provision levels are at least 70 € lower than a realistic minimum subsistence level ought to be. In 2013, the alliance had published various materials and texts to be used during the election campaign, which were used by the alliance partners. nak played an active role.

European Poverty Politics – EAPN

In 2013, the nak EAPN delegates met in Berlin (8th March, 12th June, 15th November).

Commitment within the Executive Committee (ExCo): The "Mainz Declaration against Poverty and Exclusion" by the local poverty conference of the German federal state Rhineland was presented as a means to make candidates commit to a more social policy before the elections. This idea was adopted EAPN for the European Parliament elections in 2014. EAPN Slovenia was excluded due to prolonged conflicts within the network. nak's and others' criticism of the Membership Assessment and Support System (MASS) led to an abandonment of a mandatory participation within the networks.

EU Inclusion Strategies Group (EUISG): Questions concerning the European Semester in 2013 were answered (evaluation of the national reform programme, evaluation of the national social report and of the country-specific recommendations). nak's shadow report and the successful cooperation with a Berlin street magazine were presented as an alternative to the official social reports. Subsequently, EAPN created a template for alternative social reports in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy and made it available.

nak participated in the task forces on EU structural funds and child poverty. The results can be found in the publications section on <http://www.eapn.eu>

Learning Forum, Estonia, 22nd -25th May: Dignity International presented empowerment methods, which are however hardly applicable in Germany. Furthermore interesting group work was offered on topics such as single parenthood, agenda setting, and on NPOs without resources, et cetera.

12th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, Brussels, 18th - 20th June: nak and a group of people experiencing poverty actively participated in the European meeting. Beforehand, EAPN delegates were involved in a campaign lobbying for a continuation of the meetings that are organized with the support of the Commission and the EU Council Presidency.

General Assembly, Belgrade (Serbia), 15th June: The structural reform (strategic plan 2012 - 15) has led to a downsizing of the annual general meeting. Since 2013, only three representatives per network have taken part. The weighting of votes has remained the same, ie nak has retained eight votes. The ExCo is supposed to discuss changing the weighting of votes and to present a proposal at the Strategic Congress in 2015.

"EAPN F and Prize for Transnational Learning": The German Poverty Network applied for the prize with the idea "European Union of the Homeless" (European network of those concerned) – unfortunately without success. The prize-giving ceremony took place in Brussels on 30th September (during the annual policy conference).

Presentation at the Local Poverty Conference in Berlin, 6th November. Subject: European Dimension of Poverty Reduction

EU Structural Fund: In collaboration with the "Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege" (BAGFW), a German network of statutory welfare organizations, nak supported the idea of a German policy to fight poverty as part of the Operational Programme of the European Structural Fund (federal level) – unfortunately without success. In addition, on a European level the mandatory introduction of a EU assistance fund for those most affected by poverty was criticized by nak and BAGFW as it only focused on material support instead of on social inclusion measures. They favoured a model of options, which allowed the member states to decide for themselves whether they wanted to implement the fund or not. With this demand, nak differed in its positions from EAPN and other European umbrella organizations. It has now been decided that the EU assistance funds will be implemented mandatorily, however, including measures for social inclusion.

Campaigns: participation in the Europe-wide campaigns "Water is a Human Right" and for an ESF minimum percentage for poverty reduction "*EU Money for Poverty Reduction NOW!*"

3rd Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, Brussels (November): Representatives of the following organisations attended the congress as part of the German delegation: the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales), the German Confederation of Trade Unions (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund), the Workers' Welfare Association (Arbeiterwohlfahrt), the Institute for Social Research and Social Policy (Institut für Sozialforschung und Gesellschaftspolitik), the German Association for Public and Private Welfare (Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge), the European Anti-Poverty Network Germany, the Poverty Network (Armutnetzwerk e.V.) and nak.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, and Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, opened the two-day event. Barroso and Van Rompuy reported that the aim of the Europe 2020 strategy to reduce the number of people affected by poverty by 25 percent – and hence by 20 million people – could not be reached under the current conditions. On the contrary, poverty has increased by approximately five million EU citizens due to the crises in many countries.

Both speakers promised to deal effectively with poverty with the help of means employed by the EU. The European Commission has brought a social investment program worth billions into existence. 20 percent of the amount will be used for the fight against poverty in Europe. Priorities were discussed in the workshops, such as the reduction of child poverty, improving access of Roma to the labour market, integrated strategies for housing the homeless, appropriate health care and the development of political solutions for disadvantaged young people.

Conclusion of the meeting: The European Commission's scope of action seems to be limited, despite the use of considerable resources. The political situations in the member states do not allow for the Europe 2020 strategy to be successfully implemented.

Europe 2020 and Flagship Platform against Poverty

Based on its criticism of the national reform programme of the German federal government and the lack of measures to fight poverty, nak has focused on two issues: weaknesses and gaps of the German health insurance system and defining nak's self-conception and standpoint in terms of poverty reduction. Both topics were discussed during a kick-off event for each topic in 2013 and are going to be continuously dealt with in 2014.

1st Event on 9th September 2013

"Uninsured despite Compulsory Insurance – more and more People Slip through the Net of Medical Care." Meeting participants:

- Prof. Dr. Dipl. - Soz. Päd. Gerhard Trabert (Professor MD, Cert. Soc. Ped), chairman and founder of the Association Poverty and Health in Germany, professor of social medicine and social psychiatry at the Hochschule RheinMain, social science department
- Joachim Speicher, CEO of the PARITÄTISCHER Wohlfahrtsverband Hamburg and spokesman of nak
- Andreas Mengler, CEO of the Hamburg Care Association (Hamburger Fürsorgevereins). The association has been supporting delinquent people and their families for over 60 years.

Key messages and demands: The current dual system of public and private health insurance has led to a two- or even three-class health care system. Adequate health care for socially disadvantaged people is not sufficiently possible anymore. The existing health care system is socially unbalanced and unfair. Due to high costs and unpaid fees the spiral of poverty and exclusion from health care is worsening. We must take political action: the introduction of a national citizens' health insurance system (so called 'Bürgerversicherung', a reform model for health insurance in Germany. The basic idea is to introduce a single health insurance for all citizens.) is an appropriate and necessary step towards a solidarity funded health care system. It must be part of a strategy to fight poverty.

2nd Event on 16th September 2013

In a workshop titled "nak's Self-conception and Standpoint in terms of Poverty Reduction" representatives of all nak member organizations discussed strategic objectives of nak with regards to the inadequate poverty reduction politics of the federal German government. The state phasing out structural and sustainable measures for the prevention of poverty leads to an increase in offers of private initiatives aimed at lightening people's sufferings (food bank [German: Die Tafel], cultural lodges, et cetera). These "politics of charity" were critically discussed in the workshop. The resulting first ideas of a self-conception will be advanced further and introduced into the political debate concerning the national reform programme in 2014.

Press and Public Relations

In the reporting period, nak critically observed political developments concerning poverty and suggested how the situation of people experiencing poverty could be improved.

Media highlight in 2013 was the presentation of the poverty assessment report at the federal press conference. nak together with the Der PARITÄTISCHE Gesamtverband proved to Berlin journalists that poverty in Germany has continuously been growing despite positive economic developments. nak and Der PARITÄTISCHE demanded a targeted financial support of communities in financial distress as well as a package of measures to fight poverty and to maintain local social infrastructures.

In addition, in the reporting period nak critically looked at the 'Fourth Poverty and Wealth Report' of the German federal government, called for urgent corrections in the education and participation package, argued for a socially just energy revolution and supported the 'Umfairteilen Alliance' (Re-distribute fairly alliance) for a higher taxation of wealth and assets.

During the parliamentary elections in September 2013, nak invited all candidates to make a stand against poverty and exclusion by signing a declaration. nak asked the politicians to declare that

- they would draw attention to the social causes of poverty and exclusion and fight them.
- they would be – in accordance with the nak declaration – in support of initiatives and legislative projects to reduce poverty and social exclusion,
- they would enter a continuous dialogue with associations, initiatives and organizations of people experiencing poverty,
- they would consult nak and local poverty conferences in Germany on poverty-related matters at federal and local level,
- they would speak appreciatively and respectfully of people who are threatened or affected by poverty and social exclusion.

All press releases are also available on the website: www.nationale-armutskonferenz.de