

## **Annual report from the Icelandic Network 2015**

EAPN Iceland was founded in November 2011.

The Annual General Meeting of EAPN Iceland 2015 took place on the 27th of April.

### **Influencing National Governments for better policies**

Every year we answer a EUISG questionnaire on government actions on battling poverty and social exclusion. As Iceland is not a EU member, we do not have a National Reform Program to go by so our network is faced by extra work, digging around for information to fill in the questionnaire. This involves getting information from different reports, recommendations, lists and services.

Last year, the questionnaire was due just after national elections, before the policy of the then newly elected government was properly demonstrated. Therefore, last year's report was based on the work of the previous government. This year's report is more reflective of the policy of the new government and will serve as a shadow report, highlighting the issues we need to work on and press for change and/or take action. The current government has proposed and made some drastic changes to our education system which we fear may limit the chances of people who have dropped out of mid-level education (usually aimed at ages 16-20) of returning to their studies and therefore limiting their access to higher education.

Also, the current government's policy seems to benefit most those in mid- and highest wage brackets so we may have a busy year ahead in influencing government policies. We just need to set the focus on where it is most needed and monitor effects of changes already made.

Our participation and work on the EMIN project will be a helpful tool for our work on influencing and criticizing government policies and we intend to do further work on our report.

The Welfare Watch was reestablished by the Ministry of Welfare as of last year and published a report with a 10-step action plan in strengthening low-income families with children. This report will be useful for our work. Vilborg's seat in the WW is also good for the Network.

Porbera's participation on the Ministry's Committee on housing issues was also important. The committee published its report and recommendations last year but we wait for them to be implemented and for the result of their implementation.

## **Participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in internal and external workings of the national network.**

The 13th annual international PeP-assembly was held in September of last year. It was our 3rd year in attendance.

This time we again sent 3 delegates, along with National Coordinator, Ásta Dís, one from each area of operation. One gentleman from Reykjavík, one lady from Akureyri and one previous delegate from Reykjanesbær. Unfortunately there was little preparation for the meeting for the delegates, and the theme was difficult for us to engage in: Structural Funds.

The breakout workshops met mixed reviews. Our group split into two teams with one delegate and the national coordinator attending one workshop while the other two delegates attended the workshop on wealth and inequality. Those two delegates were very active and energized from the workshop and came away feeling empowered. The first workshop, however, seemed to be quite disappointing by the two attending.

The final day of the assembly was difficult for the majority of the group to follow, but one of the delegates spent the morning meetings tweeting news quotes on behalf of Brussels EAPN network and was proud to be a part of the assembly. Two of the delegates remained for the end of the parliaments meetings and met up with the national coordinator and other delegates later in the day.

At the end of last year, after the international assembly, the national coordinator resigned due to health reasons, and another National Coordinator was named, former participant, Ester Ellen Nelson. Since that time, a few meetings of the Reykjavík PeP members, and several meetings of Akureyri PeP members have been held. The first meeting of Reykjanesbær is scheduled very soon.

The groups are working towards a better understanding of their role in PeP and EAPN as a whole. They are keeping busy while waiting on the theme to begin preparing for this year's international assembly. One project is to read through the book, *Breaking Barriers*, as a team for better understanding. Recruitment, attention and advertising to bring in more active members is also a focus. The facebook page, started at the end of 2014, is gaining more and more attention. The national coordinator has also designed informational posters and is working on a tri-fold flyer to gain more public attention.

Our PEP foundation work is still in process and we are still figuring out the best way to organize it efficiently. The group has grown, and many have expressed interest in taking part, which is promising for the next steps. The EAPN Training Seminar, which recently took place in Brussels, will prove useful for this area of work as well, and Laufey, the Participant from Iceland, will be presenting its material to new members and associates.

## **Development and growth of the network**

The board has had regular meetings from the 2014 General Meeting. There have also been smaller group meetings around smaller projects.

The network has also extended to other parts of the country (other than Reykjavík) and is now also operating in Akureyri and Reykjanesbær. It is extremely important to reach other areas of the country to get a broader perspective of how people are doing in different parts. The Reykjavík area usually gets the most media attention so establishing EAPN work in other municipalities helps to bring attention to people living in more remote or isolated areas.

We have been working on expanding the network in terms of getting in more member associations. We have been lacking the voices of immigrants and Icelanders of foreign origin and have been fortunate enough to get two NGOs providing these voices involved with our network.

The EAPN publication “Breaking barriers – Driving change” has also been translated into Icelandic and is available through our website in pdf format. We intend to form PEP work groups in all 3 network locations and read the book with participants, using it as an empowerment tool for people experiencing poverty.

In 2014, Iceland took part in “European Platform against Poverty”. Vilborg attended on behalf of the Icelandic network, accompanied by three representatives of the Welfare Ministry.

We have started to produce material for promoting the network, focusing on people experiencing poverty. Our website is up and running and we are also keeping an active Facebook page.

## **Governance and internal democracy**

Our work with MASS has been useful for strengthening internal organization, setting a good foundation for further growth.

Our Annual General Meetings have grown in attendance from year to year, strengthening member’s understanding and knowledge of the work.

We have made no changes to the board in the last 2 years, and active members have been stable, deepening their knowledge and understanding of the EAPN and the work that needs to be done.

As our funds are limited we have almost no paid employees (apart from cost with special projects), it has been very valuable to have board members with paid positions at their NGOs, who have been able to do their work for EAPN on that payroll.

Naturally, volunteers have a harder time juggling their daily routines with work for

the EAPN. Still, a part-time employee and an office space would be very useful for efficient work on behalf of the network. This is a long-term goal.