

# Report from EAPN Ireland for 2015

## Introduction

EAPN Ireland is a membership organisation of community groups working against poverty in Ireland. Staff and volunteers provide effective and targeted support for people experiencing poverty and their organisations in understanding and influencing policy at Irish and EU level. In 2014, this involved:

- A regular and reliable news and information service for community organisations and decision makers through policy briefings, the monthly newsflash and social media postings
- Clear and well-researched analysis based on the experience of members
- Liaison with Government, Oireachtas (Parliament) and EU, especially the Irish MEPs, the Minister and Department of Social Protection, the European Commission and EAPN (Europe)
- Preparing and supporting the Irish delegation to the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty
- Facilitating the Better Europe Alliance of social and environmental NGOs and trade unions to follow the European semester

## 1. Influencing National Governments for Better Policies: Advocacy, Lobbying and Policy-Making linked to European Level developments

Much of our policy work is led by the EAPN Ireland Policy Group on the Europe 2020 Strategy, made up of Age Action Ireland, Congress Centres Network, Disability Federation of Ireland, EAPN Ireland, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, Irish Traveller Movement, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, National Adult Literacy Agency, National Youth Council of Ireland, National Women's Council of Ireland, One Family and the country's biggest trade union SIPTU.

Some activities included:

Engaging with the Government's plans for 'activation'. An important Position Paper on Positive Activation formed the focus for a lot of this work, including meetings with the Low Pay Commission and a Parliamentary Committee.

Publishing a Briefing on poverty, 2015 and proposals for 2016-2021, published in December 2015. This outlines in some detail the extent of poverty in Ireland and the challenges faced by the next Government. **Section 5 of that publication** urges "...all parties and candidates for the next *Dáil* to commit to a new five year strategy against poverty and social exclusion covering the term of the next *Dáil*, to replace the current National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2007-2016)."

In relation to the Annual Budget (*Budget 2016*), EAPN Ireland's pre-budget submission was used as part of the preparatory material for the Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister)'s Pre-Budget Forum. Our section on impact assessment and 'proofing;' was discussed in some detail in one of the workshops and, informally, with DSP officials, the Tánaiste and her economic advisor. We also put out a Press Release following the Budget which was picked

up by RTE and the newspapers. EAPN Ireland also coordinated the production and distribution of a new version of the Community Platform's Four tests for Budget 2016 'Four Tests for Budget 2016' which has provided a useful point of reference (and quotes) for politicians, journalists and policy workers. The press release just before the Budget led to two radio interviews.

Some other policy submissions in 2015 by EAPN Ireland and alliances included:

- Response to government poverty figures issued today *November 2015*
- Better Europe Alliance Press Release in advance of meeting with Oireachtas Committee on EU Affairs, *October 2015*
- Community Platform Four Tests for Budget 2016, *October 2015*
- Briefing on Poverty Targets, European Semester and Europe 2020, *September 2015*
- Response to 2015 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland, *September 2015*
- Position Paper on Positive Activation, *July 2015*
- Community Platform Press release and publication Widening inequality hitting most vulnerable, *July 2015*
- Budget 2016 – unless we prioritise vital, well targeted spending over tax cuts, the misery for many will continue., *June 2015*
- Press release on new Commission recommendations, *May 2015*
- Anti-Poverty Network welcomes Oireachtas Committee Report declaring Direct Provision for Asylum Seekers “not fit for purpose”, *May 2015*
- Submission on the Draft Framework Policy for Local and Community Development, *April 2015*
- Submission to Irish National Reform Programme 2015, *April 2015*
- Press Release Poverty figures show need for 5 year plan against poverty, *January 2015*

## **2. Participation of People Experiencing Poverty and Social Exclusion in Internal and External Workings of the National Network**

EAPN Ireland and the Community Workers Co-operative (now Community Work Ireland) again worked with the Department of Social Protection to prepare for the annual Social Inclusion Forum (SIF). This is the main opportunity for anti-poverty groups and people affected by poverty to meet decision-makers to discuss all aspects of policy and its impact. We organised a series of six workshops around the country to discuss poverty issues and prepare to take part in the Forum, as well as supporting feedback from these to the forum itself. We interviewed a number of participants at the regional meetings and created a video about the experiences and hopes of participants which was shown at the Social Inclusion Forum and at the Government High Level Committee on Social Policy and distributed widely in social media.

In June 2015, EAPN Ireland and Community Action Network (CAN) organised workshops in Ennis, Longford, Cork or Dublin to provide space to reflect on our passion for social justice, how we might connect more deeply with it and direct it more effectively.

Three former delegates to the European PEP meetings are currently Board members.

### **3. Development and Growth of the Network (including growth and training and capacity building actions)**

Training work includes the workshops before the Social Inclusion Forum, discussed in the previous section,

Our information work includes:

- EAPN Ireland NewsFlash
- Website: The EAPN Ireland website provides a hub for information and analysis on social policy developments in Ireland and in the European Union. And is the point of reference for much of our social media work. The site attracts between 3,000 and 4,000 unique visitors every month.
- The EAPN Ireland Facebook page now has over 1,750 'likes'. The Twitter feed has over 2,600 followers.

EAPN Ireland continued to maintain a modest but consistent media profile,

Networking and Alliances: EAPN Ireland acted as Secretariat for the Community Platform, which groups most national equality and social inclusion organisations.

### **4. Governance and Internal Democracy (including internal governance, respect of statutory requirements, management in the network and funding).**

EAPN Ireland has a wide ranging membership which includes local, regional and national organisations concerned with the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Other stakeholders, including individuals, academics, political actors and state actors, have joined the network as associate members, without voting rights.

EAPN Ireland has over 250 local and national members across Ireland, despite losing members through closure of organisations due to the recession and funding cuts.

EAPN Ireland is governed by an Annual General Meeting which elects the Board. The Board in turn elects officers who oversee the day to day management of the organisation.

EAPN Ireland receives core funding from the Department of Environment and Local Government's Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector.

The staff during this period was Robin Hanan (Director), Paul Ginnell (Policy Officer) and Maureen Gondipon (Finance and Administration Officer).

The EAPN Ireland Board was:

Aiden Lloyd (South Dublin); Anne Loftus (Clare, Chairperson); Farai Calvin Jeyacheya (Zimbabwe Heritage Trust); Joan O'Donnell (Disability Federation of Ireland after AGM);

Lorraine Mulligan (SIPTU, Vice Chair); Maureen Ward (Offaly Travellers Movement, Treasurer); Michael Mackey (Galway Simon Communities); Pat Doyle (Peter McVerry Trust); Philip O'Connor (Dublin); Sheila Simmons (until the AGM); Tess Murphy (Longford Women's Link and rep on EAPN Europe Executive)

Members on EAPN Europe structures included:

- Tess Murphy, Longford Women's Link, on the Executive Committee
- Paul Ginnell on the Social Inclusion Working Group, also a member of its steering group
- Robin Hanan as Coordinator of the Irish Delegation to the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty