



2017 Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth "Youth and Social Inclusion"

Side Event: Ensuring the right of young people to adequate income

Heiki Viisiima

EAPN Estonia, European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty

Good afternoon, my name is Heiki Viisiima and I come from Estonia, where I am a member of EAPN and work for the empowerment of young people in my country.

One of the most significant issues that young people are faced with in Estonia is access to different social benefits. Once the age of 18 years old is reached, child support is over, and there are no other benefits aimed at this age group. It is difficult to get access to a minimum income scheme on your own.

As a student, one cannot apply for minimum income or for a scholarship separately from one's parents – up to 24 years of age, one has to be supported by one's family. Everyone up to the age of 24 is automatically counted to be economically connected to their parents - which often is simply not the case. So it is possible to access minimum income scheme only if one's parents are currently benefitting from it as well. Recently, the Government adopted legislation that is hostile for young people. For instance, part time students have to pay for their studies, while it is very difficult to study and work at the same time.

The European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty organized by the European Commission and EAPN are a space for people who live in hardship to have their voices heard. I have attended the Meeting for three years in a row (2014, 2015, 2016), and I am now the National Coordinator for Estonia.

The Meeting of 2014 was dedicated to ***Funding the Fight against Poverty*** as an overall theme, and also included a workshop, co-organised with the Youth Forum, dedicated to youth poverty. On the occasion, EAPN's position paper on [*Youth Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe*](#) was launched. You can find the publication on your seats and on the EAPN website.

In 2015, the Meeting was entitled ***Social Conversion in the EU***, and it discussed the European Pillar of Social Rights, and one of the key messages of the meeting was that adequate income should be accessible for all EU citizens, alongside other social welfare measures. We hope to see this important message adequately reflected in the proposal for the Pillar which the Commission will publish in two days.



The 2016 Meeting, **Empowerment through Participation**, was dedicated to how important it is that people experiencing poverty, including young people, participate in making decisions that affect them. This is another message that we hope to see supported in the upcoming Social Pillar proposal.

One of the Key Messages that came out of this Meeting was that participation should be part of the school curriculum, but school is not enough. Non-formal education programmes should also be funded to strengthen people's skills and knowledge. Participation is a 'sticky habit' – if someone participates in different projects and decision making processes in their early life, they will continue to participate throughout their whole life.

In EAPN, we believe that participation of different marginalized groups is very important, this is why we are asking for political support, as well as adequate resources to be allocated to work aiming at strengthening participation of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, including young people.