

Annual Convention 2017

Report by European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)

The Annual Convention on Inclusive Growth 2017 took place on the 24th April in Brussels with the participation of over 400 stakeholders from the national and EU level. The Convention however gave a reduced focus to the overall themes of inclusive growth, or in monitoring progress on poverty and social exclusion, although it still exists in the reference framework, with a priority given this year to youth inclusion.

The timing – 2 days before the launch of the European Pillar of Social Rights package also seemed a missed opportunity to debate with stakeholders the implications of the package and support its implementation. As a result, it was not always clear on the objectives, or how the Convention could lead to policy impact.

Strong statements of support were given from the EU institutions for the need for a more balanced EU – with economic and social justice on a par, and concrete actions linked to the pillar in the area of employment rights, access to social protection and work-life balance. The main focus of the Convention was on ways to challenge youth inclusion: support was given to ensuring access to minimum income and social protection, quality employment and services, including housing and health with strong priority to tailored, accompanying support at the local level. The importance of social and political participation of young people, children and their families became a recurring theme. The format involved plenary and workshop debate with inputs from the Commission and the Council, young people in poverty, young MEPs, academics and some input from NGOs, particularly in the workshops. The side events offered an important opportunity for more grass-roots expertise and examples driven by NGOs and other stakeholders including EAPN's own workshop on ensuring access to adequate income for young people (minimum income and minimum wages).

The conference was closed by a panel discussion then concluding remarks from Valdis Dombrovskis, Vice President, Euro and Social Dialogue highlighting the need for more Social Europe and more inclusive growth.

“We must put social progress and economic growth on an equal footing. Europe is one of the most equal, but we can do more. Economic growth and employment is the best way, but a job is not always a guarantee of income security. We have 9.5% of working poor. We must push harder to make growth more inclusive. We have been pushing active inclusion, modernizing social protection systems and addressing inclusive labour markets. But it must have income support and access to quality social services”.

Marianne Thyssen

Commissioner Thyssen opened the conference highlighting the EU's successes in overcoming the current crisis and in reinforcing the social model. She recognised however that poverty has increased, together with rising inequality. The upcoming adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights package was highlighted as a means to help overcome these gaps – particularly ‘fighting inequalities’. The focus of the convention on youth was underlined, because of their specific role in the future of Social Europe.

“European Model is a successful model. Our social model has contributed to the progress of our societies, helping people overcome difficulties and stabilising our economy”. “However, Europe is off track on reducing poverty. 30% of young people are at risk. Inequality is rising.

The incomes of 20% richest are 5 x higher than the poorest and is 7 or 8 x worse in some countries. The European Pillar of Social Rights reaffirmed the commitment to social Europe. But the social model needs to be fit for purpose. All citizens must share the benefits of growth. Fighting inequalities is one of the strongest focus' of the pillar. Equal opportunities need active measures. Youth have a particular role in Social Europe. Some of these key rights are: the right to inclusive education, childcare and essential services, and access to social protection for the most vulnerable groups. The Pillar will be underpinned by concrete actions: For workers and employers on the written statement directive on employment rights; access to social protection, we have to ensure that everybody is covered and contributes to social protection – we need a wide safety net. We also need intergenerational fairness: we will launch our work-life balance initiative.”

“Inclusive Europe is one that empowers and enables everyone to fulfil themselves”.

Evarist Bartolo/Maltese Presidency

Mr Bartolo insisted on a return to a focus on human beings, not just economics and markets, and the need to ensure that growth delivers a fairer a society. He also insisted on the importance of tackling poverty in Africa. *“We allow the language of business and economics to decide what we do. We talk about human capital not people, but unless it’s linked to personal growth and social justice it’s not enough.*

“Inclusive growth must include discussion on the economic model, services and society that works for all.”

Africa is a key issue: where 12 million young people hope to find a job but only 1/3 find a job. It is obvious that if there is no work people will leave.

Panel Discussion

Martin Berthelsen, SAND, (Homeless person)

Mr Berthelsen spoke movingly about his experience of homelessness and the key role played by self-organized associations/NGOs like SAND, and receiving peer support.

“I was homeless for several years. It can happen to anyone. I was a trainee in a company and all the youth were laid off. I lost my granddad, and then I lost everything in just 3 months and became homeless. It was very difficult to get out of the situation”

“The staff in the shelters don’t understand our problems – they speak an administrative language. I was lucky to meet somebody from SAND. You have to be homeless to be part of the organization. I got a flat after 10 months. 466 Euros a month with bills, but social benefits are only 600 Euros. So it’s not enough to live. You are forced to be in work schemes. But you have to pay for transport and costs.

I cofounded a youth network that has 5 local networks. People under 30 can come together and support each other. We have a big problem of loneliness in Denmark, so solidarity between young people is important. We won the solidarity prize.

Maria Joao Rodrigues, MEP

“We need a pillar that is strong and credible, that can deal with extreme situations.

Whoever is homeless, suffering from exclusion, can count on the pillar restart their life. Access to housing is a key starting point, for the pillar of social rights, and all the relevant social services. We need to help to participate in society, useful activity, training, preparing for a job, and ensure they are included in social participation. They must not feel alone. More investment for jobs and to support people.

We need new rights for European citizens. Young people are being discriminated against – with the minimum wage. We need young people active in the real decision-making process.”

Evan Maydel (MEP)

“Youth must be able to dream. We need an educational system adapted to this. We need more commitment to engage with those who are more disengaged. Young people need to be ambassadors for their own communities. Reaching out and being a role model and mentor”

Carina Autenbruber/ European Youth Forum

“We want a society that is not just growing economically, but also socially – this means with growing rights. Participation is a right!”

Workshop 2: Investing in Children and breaking the cycle of disadvantage

The Workshop was chaired by Maria Joao Rodrigues and focussed on solutions for challenging the transmission of poverty and reinforcing prevention, working alongside families and children in the community. Contributions emphasized the key role of parental support, particularly from fathers, as well as joined up working with services/professionals to ensure access to key services and support into employment. Overall family support was seen as crucial, as well as encouraging participation from children and their parents, although this is less well developed or mainstreamed in community development and services provision practice. A key priority is early learning.

Reneke Keizer

Highlighted research on investment/socio economic status and the role of parenting behaviour. Inequality begins at home. Fathers have a unique role. Girls are less likely to pursue traditional jobs and boys participate in household tasks if their fathers are involved meaningfully in their care.

Breaking intergenerational transmission of poverty, means challenging parental practice with a particular focus on the father. Child development has to focus on parents not just on child development.

Sophie Schwab/EAPN Germany stressed the structural causes of poverty as a key starting point. The need to ensure that families have good jobs, services and access to decent benefits. She presented the example of a local project working on ‘prevention chains’ of child and family poverty.

See her [powerpoint](#).

“Children are poor if their families are poor. Networking between state and NGO agencies are key to tackling transmission -prevention chains. These are centres which provide all services, working in a joined-up way between the services, divided into specific age group, starting from young babies.

A key focus is training the professionals eg on child abuse.

The project was developed as a pilot project and now gets regular budget from municipal funding, as it was seen as successful. All organizations across the different actors are keen to be involved, because they have built a new dynamic.”

Maria Joao Rodrigues

“The project wants to get to the root of child poverty – involving professionals in all areas: nutrition, health, employment and adapted to different age groups from an early age from zero. We can see that the methodology is really comprehensive, with political drive and funding and with rigorous evaluation on results.”

Jean-Jacques Derrein/City of Nantes. Rethinking childcare and investing in children

Nantes has a high proportion of single parents and low income. The city has a strong early childhood policy from 2 weeks to 3 years old, then the children go to school.

The main focus is one stop shop, with assessment of needs, improving access to the labour market, especially for single parents, and investing in early childhood, early education and social protection. Also early school leaving is a priority.

They aim to create a virtuous circle providing support to parents/prevention.

3 main criteria are in place: – one stop shop, new and more emergency places, partnership.

Main target group are those receiving RSA – with the aim of social inclusion through employment – as the main focus. The aim to provide tailored solutions in childcare.

The outcome is a concrete network of stakeholders: social workers etc, building trust and values for quick solutions and monitoring the process together.

In terms of results: 143 families used the service, 80% had a positive impact – better coordination, and more emergency childcare.

The main concern is how to work together to find solutions. Poverty is a global issue. He underlined the importance of holistic/integrated support for the whole family. The services need to be concrete, networking with professionals and the population to develop good public services for the whole family.

Discussion

- Structural poverty is very crucial – more focus needs to be given to access to adequate social protection, but also key public services like Housing and Health.
- Participation is crucial of parents and children and not just early childhood, prevent early school leaving and work with parents to have sessions to participate together
- Helping parents to get more confidence to say what are their needs.

Final plenary

Summaries from workshops

1. Opening up quality pathways for young people

- Involvement of different partners
- Guidance (Group/individual)
- Reaching autonomy (Income/housing) and ensuring family support
- Access to information
- Small steps matter – evaluation must include this ie soft skills they acquire
- Recognition of participation (towards employers) as working experience.

Quote from Romanian woman in workshop: “EVS for all – after coming back home she felt more European and responsible for society”

2. Investing in Children

- Making tackling child poverty as a political priority – socio economic status has a huge impact and on their family life
- Professionals need to work together across sectors at local level – eg prevention chains and challenge to build the capacity of them to network for all groups: migrants children, homeless, institutional care
- Connect and Listen – giving children and parents a leading role in designing services even small scale projects can have impact – then to roll them out.
- Support families of all forms – role of fathers – being present, family income correlates to time and inequality. Parents need time with their children – role of paternal/maternal income
- Start investing early in life and throughout the lifecycle.

3. Intergenerational fairness

- No it's not fair unless we do something.
- The economy is recovering but not inclusive and not for young people who are over-represented in low quality jobs. NEETs – there is a general bias, also against women.
- Social protection policy can be a game changer, but are often biased against the young – coverage and access are key and don't reflect the reality for young people. Room for improvement. Age limits to minimum income, minimum wage, housing and health. Social protection policies are age biased geared to protect retired. It should develop to support new types of employment - away from short term solutions. Youth guarantee has not been as effective, need for assessment and evaluation to prevent repetition of mistakes.
- It's not about the money, but also about how you spend it – the distribution of income. And how to involve the NGOs. Social economy can provide a more structured route.
- Don't need to invent the wheel, focus on implementation.
- EU pillar of social rights, but it's not a magic pill – it needs to be implemented, with support from member states.
- People need to be more involved in decision-making.

4. Social Inclusion Challenges of young people in urban areas

- Help young people find their voices. Reach out to help them discover opportunities.

- Local authorities and NGOs do great work. Policy makers should listen to them.
- Young people are all individuals, guidance support should be as well- ie tailored
- Services must cater to young people through life transitions
- Integrate policies and services across departments into a holistic approach
- Collaborate with actors on the ground (NGOs, Las, religious organizations)
- Funding matters. It must be available, accessible and sustainable.

5. Social inclusion challenges of young people with disabilities

- Choices for people with disabilities are decreasing – improve choice, depends on perception, identity, cultures, education, and family.
- Employment in a capitalist society – social inclusion, segmented labour markets affect career aspirations.
- Transition from childhood to adulthood: need for multi-dimensional, holistic support – link employment, education and social protection policies, with long-term individualised support
- Universal Basic income – could help to define value but shouldn't replace efforts to tackle exclusions
- Use EU Pillar, EU regulations and UNCRPD = promoting best practices
- Promotion of good practices and good lives – aspirational role models, and act in an inclusive way.

Final Panel

Georg Fischer, European Commission

“Many conclusions from the workshops relate to the Pillar: Social protection can be a game changer. Parental leave can make a real difference. Start early and integrated with services. Collaborate with NGOs on the ground. Flexibilise EU funding

At the moment social protection systems in some countries cover small parts of the population. This the pillar will address the issue of ‘social protection for all’. We need to address the huge gap in protection. This particularly affects young people with non-standard employment contracts.

We need parental leave which makes a difference and rebalances support for men and women, that is also good for the labour market.

Funding is not a direct issue of the pillar. But it is important. It reflects the interaction between you, the member states and the EU.”

Javier Lopez (MEP)

“57% of the youth feel marginalized and this differs across countries. In Spain, it's 79%, Portugal – 83% and Greece, it's 93%. One of the key lessons of the crisis is that the countries with low levels of inequality do better in growth. Equality matters, solidarity and dignity – and also for growth. We must look behind the economic numbers – think about our social standards, and the soul of the European Project. How can we do it? What instruments? What resources and which rules? Digitalisation is a huge challenge, we are working on this. We need a directive on decent working conditions, and in relation to the living wage index. We

have the Semester, this is a key tool. We must have more than social policies, it must be mainstreamed into the economic ones. We need a social protection floor – but we need more than nice recommendations, we need rules. Legislative framework between personal and work life and against discrimination. A social protocol to ensure fundamental rights over economic freedoms”

Michele Le Voy/Social Platform

“How can we have a life cycle approach? We need to look at children before they become youth. We need affordable, quality services. But also on the implementation of the Investing in Children – not just looking back but looking forward. Can we look at targets on child poverty? There is a decline in living conditions, and child poverty is increasing in some countries. We have a lot of solutions but what we need is implementation. We have to make sure they are not being discriminated against. ie levels of minimum income for the homeless representative wasn’t sufficient to allow him to live or to travel to a job/training. There is also the whole world of work. Unpaid internships are very problematic – and should be eliminated. We need apprenticeships. We shouldn’t have a youth minimum wage – why have age discrimination? ILO says that these wages conflict with equal pay for equal value. Also the problem of zero or unfixed hours contracts without a stable or secure source of income.”

Intervention from Julien Vangeertsom/Belgian Govt

“If you keep using methods that cause failure, you will continue to fail. This is the problem of austerity which the Commission continues to encourage.”

liliya Harizanova, Social Tea house, Varna

“As a youth association, we try to treat young people as equal. Leaving orphanages, they aren’t used to being in charge of everything in their lives. They seek alternative jobs, with poor education and communication skills, so they fail. We work on this, but once they are in a programme on minimum income – it’s not enough to cover their expenses – so they quit. Now they realize that it gives them a social network and a help towards a way out, so some return.”

Georg Fischer

“The Commission wanted to change the fiscal policy, but the governments said no. We want to change the austerity policies. If MS follow the guidance we would have a restructuring. The Commission has said we have made mistakes. We need to emphasize the importance of the social”

Javier Lopez

“Youth will find their own way of participating, if the political system doesn’t adapt.”

Valdis Dombrovskis, Vice President, Euro and Social Dialogue

- *“There is a commitment to inclusive growth as a basic principle to Social Europe. We have one of the most prosperous regions. We must put social progress and economic growth on an equal footing. Europe is one of the most unequal. Economic growth and employment is best*

way, but job is not always a guarantee of income security. 9.5% of working poor. We must push harder to make growth more inclusive. We have been pushing active inclusion, modernizing social protection systems and address inclusive labour markets. But it must have income support and access to quality social services. Increasing productivity is key to reducing inequality...

- *Another area is child poverty. The recommendation of Investing in Children calls for strong policies, with support from civil society. Partnerships are crucial to aid implementation.*
- *We coordinate economic policies through the European Semester, we have made it more effective, with more investment, structural reforms and policies, but we must keep the focus on the weakest. Progress has been uneven, particularly on poverty and social exclusion.*
- *There is a focus on youth in the Semester, labour market reforms are a way to make it more effective, with an attention to human rights and use of EU funding.”*