

EAPN's Key Messages – Annual policy conference

Learning from the past to beyond 2020: What EU strategy to fight poverty, social exclusion & inequality

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The EU needs an explicit, rights-based integrated anti-poverty strategy based on participation and backed by EU funding, to make progress on poverty

- **The EU faces a turning point – it must promote a new development model which recognizes the structural causes of poverty, rather than blaming the poor!** This must be based on human rights, participation, universal welfare states and a fairer redistribution of power, income and wealth.
- **Invest in a personalized rights-based integrated strategy promoting active inclusion (guaranteeing access to adequate minimum income and social protection, quality services and access to quality jobs, across the life course)**, that anticipates challenges, is pro-active, preventative, forward looking for all groups based on participation.
- **No one must be left behind:** equal access is essential for all groups to these rights. Thematic strategies should be implemented for specific groups e.g. Investing in Children, Tackling homelessness/ housing exclusion.
- **Ownership and accountability can only come through participative monitoring** - of national antipoverty strategies, linked to the EU Strategy. This must involve NGOs and people experiencing poverty, at national, regional and local level in working in partnership.
- **Obligatory social rights are a fundamental pre-requisite for an EU anti-poverty strategy, but are not a replacement.** Making rights obligatory is essential, but ensuring integrated access is key to ensure a real impact on poverty for all groups. It is clear that obligatory rights and an effective EU anti-poverty strategy may need Treaty changes.
- **EU budget must increase direct funding to grass-root organizations to fight poverty:** through reinforcing the 20% of ESF on poverty and social inclusion, and developing a meaningful, costed budget line in the context of the next Multiannual Financial Framework which will support effective grass-root antipoverty initiatives involving NGOs in partnership with people in poverty and other local actors.



The post Europe 2020 agenda must build on Europe 2020 targets and deliver an ambitious social, sustainable and democratic vision for Europe! Agenda 2030 and SDGs could help!

- **The European Semester is not well-known or understood at national level. To change this will need political will, and effective coordination with EU institutions and stakeholders.** A stronger recognition must be made of the failure of the current mechanisms to inspire and engage people on the ground and the determination to learn from the past.
- **A coherent social, economic and environmental approach must put the real needs of people and well-being at the center and contribute towards a social and sustainable Europe.** This will involve a shift in the economic model away from austerity and over-reliance on the market. The “social” isn’t a dimension, but must be a core objective. Economic policies are an instrument to achieve this.

Participative social/poverty impact assessment is crucial to prevent negative economic policies that generate more poverty.

- **The EU should give more prominence to promoting fairer redistribution and social investment in Welfare States** to reduce inequality and poverty. This should include recommendations (CSRs) for fair/progressive taxation, in order to more effectively finance adequate social protection and investment in universal public services. Social investment must include promotion of more grass-roots social entrepreneurship.
- **The EU needs more ambitious and concrete frameworks that protect people's living standards – eg EU Welfare Union, a Framework Directive on minimum income, EU guarantees for minimum wage, golden rule on minimum social protection spending.** These should also be made an essential part of any discussion on Treaty changes.
- **The European Semester or new governance process must become more visible, explainable and accountable.** Participation must involve civil society organizations working with people in poverty in the design, monitoring and implementation of policy through a partnership approach. This is key to achieve ownership and increase visibility as well as reinforcing democracy and credibility of the EU.
- **The European Semester should be renamed, to reflect coherent social and sustainable objectives,** including its key instruments e.g. Annual Growth Survey. The SDGs could provide a much clearer and more ambitious framework, but could face similar problems of policy coherence across 17 goals.
- **The post 2020 framework will still need concrete measurable targets, including the poverty target with sub-targets for key groups facing high levels of poverty, as well as common indicators** and effective monitoring linked to clearer accountability. Crucial to this will be automatic triggers for policy action and recommendations (i.e. CSRs) when key benchmarks are breached – e.g. if no progress on poverty target or unacceptable levels.
- **Quality of engagement of civil society and people in poverty is vital to gain support for the new framework and should be on an equal footing with social partners.** Lessons should be learned from the UN involvement of civil society organizations and people experiencing poverty in the process to develop the SDGs. Ensuring adequate resourcing is also vital to enable sustained and effective engagement. In the long-term these changes should be reflected in the EU Treaties, but progress can still be made now if there is political will to deliver on the promises.



The European Pillar of Social Rights must be seized as an opportunity, but will need concrete implementation, and a key role for civil society to get results!

- **The European Pillar of Social Rights is an opportunity but also a *last chance* to make progress on Social Europe. However, achieving wide-spread support in Member States will depend on mobilizing civil society and people in poverty** at national, local and EU level to engage and follow up on implementation. This is also necessary to restore trust and confidence amongst NGOs and respond to the high expectations raised by their active engagement in the Social Pillar consultation.
- **Social Rights is not just about jobs! The Social Pillar needs to reinforce the focus on access to *quality jobs* and ensure equal priority to adequacy of social protection, quality services and care beyond paid work,** if it is to effectively deliver on its promises and support progress on a rights-based integrated strategy to fight poverty.
- **Clarification is needed on what convergence means! The main goal must be to close the gap between and within Member States, by raising social standards and reducing poverty and inequality.** “Upward convergence” must be explained in ordinary language spelling out the need to make tangible progress on these rights, and to actively fight social dumping or stagnation.
- **The Social Pillar must make the principles, concrete, operational and mandatory, and the scoreboard real, capable of triggering policy impact.** Whilst the principles are voluntary, they cannot be considered as rights. Progress must be made to operationalize them and make them obligatory. The Scoreboard needs more clarity on its link to the principles and must have automatic mechanisms for triggering policy recommendations if there are breaches or lack of progress.

- **Give a clear role in the implementation of the Social Pillar to NGOs and people experiencing poverty at national level.** Civil society can have a strong role in providing evidence from the ground of what's happening, what works and doesn't work as well, but also as in delivering innovative grass-root projects to deliver on the principles. This will need strong support of EU funding, including post 2020.



Support for Future of Europe depends on an ambitious 6th Scenario, capable of winning back trust in the EU

- **The current 5 scenarios proposed in the Future of Europe do not provide much for social NGOs,** as they contain little focus on social rights and social standards or the fight against poverty. Another scenario is needed!
- **The EU should take more responsibility for the negative social impact of austerity policies feeding the growth of the far right in Europe and populism.** A clearer recognition of mistakes made by the EU institutions is important for re-establishing trust for a future EU.
- **The 3rd scenario of the Reflection Paper of the Social Dimension of Europe: (*the whole EU27 could deepen the social dimension together*) is more widely supported than the 2nd proposal for a 2-tier Europe** that will reinforce social dumping and widen the inequality gap across the EU. However, more commitment is needed to develop concrete legislative frameworks to reinforce social standards, even if this means *Treaty changes*.
- **An ambitious social and sustainable vision for Europe is needed – a 6th Scenario!** There is huge confusion about what the discussion is about - is it the Eurozone, the EU or Europe? The participants called for a new vision for Europe, beyond the 5 scenarios, based on a positive new role for the EU in delivering a new transformative social and sustainable agenda.
- **The key aim of the debate must be to keep the EU together based on solidarity.** The focus on competition must be replaced by collaboration and tangible support to poorer regions and people. We must derive lessons from the past when well-being and welfare was more at the center of the debate.
- **People not just citizens!** This vision cannot just be aimed at 'legal citizens', but encompass at all people resident in the EU who have made the EU their home, for whatever reasons. This welcoming approach must ensure rights and a voice.
- **Making the EU more participative and democratic, could bring the EU back to its core, but it needs to be backed by the necessary resources. Participation of people facing poverty are key, including excluded young people!** Revitalising the EU through participation and accountability is essential, but can't be done on the cheap and needs real investment in people and democracy. People who are 'paying the price' of the failure to promote a Social Europe must be given a voice and role. New methods must be found to engage and support with the most excluded, particularly the young.