

Annual Report

2016

BAPN

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1. MEMBERLIST AND BOARDMEMBERS

A. BAPN's members

BAPN's members are the four regional anti-poverty networks:

- Brussels Poverty Platform (Brussels Platform Armoede – BPA)
- Brussels Anti-Poverty Forum (Forum Bruxellois de Lutte contre la Pauvreté – FBFLP) : new name : Le Forum : Bruxelles contre les inégalités
- Flemish Anti-Poverty Network (Netwerk tegen Armoede – NtA)
- Walloon Anti-Poverty Network (Réseau Wallon de Lutte contre la Pauvreté – RWLP)

B. The composition of our actual Board is :

Daniël Alliet (BPA),
André Chapotte (RWLP)
Bruno Vinikas (Forum)
Frans Leemans (Forum)
Michel Pettiaux (Forum)

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Frederic Vanhauwaert (NtA)
Ludo Horemans
Gaëlle Peters (RWLP)
Christine Mahy (RWLP)
Paul Rosiers (person with experience in poverty)
Guy Tordeur (Chairman BAPN)

Are invited:

David Sourdeau (team BAPN)
David Praile (coordinator BAPN)
Marleen Nuytemans (team BAPN)
Nicolas Dekuyssche (coordinator Forum)
Bart Peeters (coordinator BPA)

2. INFLUENCING NATIONAL GOVERNMENT FOR BETTER POLICIES

2.1 GENERAL POLICY

A. Federal Plan against Poverty

During the spring 2016 the federal government launched a federal plan to combat poverty. The plan was approved by the federal Government in July 2016.

The plan assembles 61 measures. One of the priorities of the Secretary of State was the increase of the social minima.

The content of the plan was presented at the Belgian Platform against Poverty, where different associations of civil society and the administration gather to debate about poverty issues.

BAPN, as part of its mission, expressed its opinions and concerns about the plan. The input was a result of collaboration with members of the network and people experiencing poverty.

During the presentation of the plan at the Belgian Platform against Poverty, BAPN reminded to the audience what its priorities were and still are:

- Increase of the social minima above the poverty threshold has stipulated in the Government agreement in 2014.
- The organisation of a broad consultation regarding the "reference address" for homeless people.

B. Belgian Committee against Poverty and thematic consultation

Each two years this Committee publishes a report concerning a specific topic. The next publication is foreseen during the autumn of 2017.

BAPN and its members were active in the committee and the elaboration of the themes that are fixed by all participants. The final document is the result of regular constructive dialogue between the different stakeholders who are active in the struggle against poverty.

The themes which were withheld are family and housing in relation to citizenship.

C. Automation of and access to the rights.

BAPN was invited in 2016 by the Commission of Social Affairs of the federal Parliament to exchange ideas concerning the automation of and access to social rights and benefits.

A broad panel was present during the hearing. It was a very interesting and where the interventions showed a large accordance between the participants regarding the necessity to facilitate the access of the automation of rights as well as the different pathways to get there.

The outcome of the hearing was a proposition of resolution by the members of Parliament.

2.2 SPECIFIC TOPICS OF ATTENTION

A. FEAD

BAPN is member of the consultation committee regarding FEAD (food assistance) that was created by the federal administration. The goal of the committee is to manage the means of the fund.

The presence of BAPN in the committee is also to guarantee the voice of the most deprived.

During the year several meetings are organised. This kind of aid is still seen by the members of BAPN as a necessary evil. There should be no food shortages for poor people if we take into account the overproduction of food and the amounts of food waste. The access to varied food should be an inalienable right.

B. Minimum Income

BAPN is the coordinator of the BMIN-network which stands for increase of minimum income schemes. The BMIN-network identifies the obstacles which prevent people in need the access to an adequate income but also to plead for the automation of social rights and the maintaining of a well-functioning social security system. BMIN is in favour of a system which does not sanction or exclude people, which in the other case lead them to less favourable social welfare.

The BMIN-network finds its origin in the first EMIN-project in 2014. Several organisations (such as trade unions and healthcare organisations) joined the partnership as well as some academics.

In 2016 a workgroup within BAPN concerning the social minima gathered several times. This workgroup was composed by the different regional networks against poverty. The collaboration between the members resulted in the publication of a consensus text in June 2016. The BMIN partners co-signed the text.

The aim of the document was to advise the federal government in the accomplishment of its engagements regarding the social minima.

Our workgroup EU 2020, composed of people experiencing poverty, had also an active role and signed the document as well.

The consensus text was delivered to the prime minister and vice-prime ministers, as to the competent policy makers of the government regarding the struggle against poverty.

Some specific aspects underpinned in the text constituted the main concerns of the further gatherings in the second half of 2016, such as the determination of the poverty threshold (absolute and relative threshold).

BAPN will take part in the second EMIN project.

C. Child Poverty

BAPN work program concerning child poverty.

In the framework of the federal anti-poverty program a particular attention is given to child poverty and the political will to reduce it.

BAPN actively participated in 2016 for this purpose.

BAPN adopted a work program within its organisation based on the experiences of people living in poverty and in collaboration with the regional networks. The aim of the work program was to come to concrete policy recommendations at different levels and to exchange on good practices.

The members of the networks also participated to a national platform concerning child poverty (Kinderen eerst - Children first).

National Plan on Child Poverty

BAPN also participated at the presentation of the draft on the National Plan on Child Poverty. BAPN reacted on one of the strategic goals of the plan which concerned the access to sufficient financial means. BAPN pleaded here as well for the increase of the social minima (wages as well as allocations).

BAPN stated also that the non-take up of social rights was a concern and that the policy makers should work on the simplification of the system to ensure the access to those rights.

In 2014 the 6th state reform transferred some important competences to the regions and communities in Belgium. Family allowances became no longer a federal competence. BAPN argued that this reform should not imply a decrease of those allowances.

Those attention points and several others were collected in a reaction note addressed to the federal administration for social integration.

Exchange on good practices

In line with the National Plan on Child Poverty, BAPN organised a moment of exchange for its members. The objective of that day was to reflect collectively about the best ways to handle with child poverty.

The Secretary of State was present and witnessed some presentations of particular initiatives.

By the end of the day the different representations and activities led to general conclusions, but it made it also possible to distinguish different factors of success in the implementation of anti-poverty policy. One of the main observations of the participants was that a right based and universal approach is a key issue in the battle against poverty.

Other activities where BAPN was actively involved:

- Roundtable Women council: one parent families, poverty and gender perspective (project MYRIAM).
- Workshop about the communication concerning child poverty organised by the King Baudouin Foundation

D. Struggle against homelessness and bad housing

The issues that kept BAPN busy concerned on one hand the reference address for homeless people and on the other hand housing of homeless people in the framework of the Housing First project.

Reference address

This theme is a real concern for BAPN and the other networks since a long time.

A reference address is an administrative address that can be granted to a homeless person. Through this address this person can maintain his social rights and the access to allocations and or social benefits.

The address can be granted by the Public Centre Social Welfare (PCSW social welfare institution) or by a private person.

In practice many problems were detected by the members of the networks: many PCSW and local authorities interpreted the legislation and regulations differently, not always in the interest of homeless people.

A complete report on the effectiveness was produced in collaboration with the regional networks and the Homeless Common Front and formed a firm basis for further action.

In January of 2016 a common approach was decided to deal with the problematic application of the reference address. A collaboration between different organizations representing homeless people, regional networks against poverty and BAPN emerged. The main goals of this common strategy was to:

- To settle the attention on the struggle against homelessness;

- To search alternatives for the actual registration system: which means that the access to social rights should not depend on whether having or not an address;
- Recommend improvements concerning the regulations and the application of them.

The partners asked the prime Minister for a broad consultation on this matter. A common letter was addressed to several competent Secretaries of State.

The office of the Prime Minister took the initiative to gather the offices of different Secretaries of State, BAPN, the regional networks and the representatives of homeless people.

The first exchange between the protagonists was constructive. Afterwards, there were a few more encounters with the cabinets of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Social Integration.

BAPN and partners were asked to make proposals and a consultation process for the draft law was designed.

No direct consequence was given to this request: at the end of 2016 the political and administrative process was still running without further consultation or information.

Housing first

The Housing First project has always had the full attention of BAPN. This project renders new perspectives regarding the help for vulnerable and homeless people.

The basic principles of the project are:

- The focus lies on the person in the guidance process without restrictions;
- Autonomous housing is a preliminary condition;
- Recovery through a multidisciplinary approach.

Although the results of the project were encouraging, more investments are needed to render it sustainable on the long term and enlarge the focus group (about 150 persons directly helped by the program for the Belgian territory).

BAPN participated in the first Housing First Peer Review organised by the federal public administration for social integration.

BAPN also participated in an international colloquium concerning Housing First, which was held in Brussels. BAPN exchanged views with Belgian and European operators in the frame of Housing First projects. It resulted in fundamental observations on the difficulties and opportunities of the Housing First concept.

E. Guarantee the right on health

BAPN participates in an action platform regarding Health and Solidarity. It gathers different actors of health promotion where they seek to develop a large vision on the social determinants in the frame of healthcare. They also promote the participation of the most vulnerable.

The goal of this platform is to organize a biennial "Together for Health" in December 2017.

F. Acces to justice

BAPN is also member of the informal Platform Right for Everyone regarding the access to justice for all and composed with progressive lawyers, NGO actives on the field,...

On September 2016 Belgian is facing an important law reform that inputs more conditions and a financial contribution to access "juridical help" (pro deo lawyers) for the most vulnerable. The platform criticize deeply, as well as most justice actors, civil society, etc. this reform which is counterproductive in terms of access to justice for the most deprived.

BAPN was also invited to attend several activities where it defended the positions of people experiencing poverty.

One of the most interesting events in 2016 about this topic was the study day involved the way magistrates see poverty. Several issues were discussed such as in debts, begging, PCSW, ...

G. Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCS)

Accessibility of the institutions

The federal administration for social integration asked the BAPN to become member of a monitoring committee to follow up a study on the quality of the accessibility (physical and practices) of the PCSW.

The research started in August 2015 and ended in June 2016. The analysis examined several dimensions such as: equal treatment, attitude of the workers towards the client, confidentiality, participation, transparency, ...

The results were discussed in two focus groups.

Personalized Project for Social Integration (PPSI)

This project is a tool that is used in the PCSW in order to help and accompany the beneficiaries to work. It is a commitment between PCSW and the beneficiary.

First, this measure was only provided for the youngsters. Once this government was installed, the intention to enlarge the PPSI to all beneficiaries of the living wage was quickly carried out.

BAPN expressed its concerns about this political choice and the rapidity to implement this measure. Moreover, this policy was contrary to the findings of a recent scientific study and against all advices of the sector.

BAPN took part in several actions and supported many others.

In the framework of the PPSI, the government rendered it possible for the beneficiary "to accept" community service without sanction if he or she should refuse. BAPN and its allies very much questions this as an open gate to "free working poor".

BAPN very much doubt the non-commitment regarding the community service, knowing that the beneficiary must sign a contract with PCSW to integrate in the labour market. But is not because society can't offer a proper inclusive job to poor people that they should be used as cheap workforce. With the risk that they could replace paid workers to lower the functioning costs for the employer.

2.3 FOLLOW UP OF THE EUROPEAN POLICY

BAPN attaches great importance to the European level.

Since the 2020 objectives were launched, BAPN started to work on those issues with a workgroup composed by persons experiencing poverty (WG EU2020).

This workgroup gathers regularly together to follow up the European policy.

In 2016 BAPN has also participated in the events that were organized by EAPN. BAPN is an active member of the EUISG group and also a member of the executive committee (EXCO) of EAPN.

BAPN had a particular attention for the triple A policy launched by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

The European Semester, the macro-economic analysis on year basis, is a key process to follow-up the policy of the European Commission.

3. PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Participation of people in poverty is the red thread in the functioning of BAPN.

Whether it concerns lobbying, raising awareness actions, dialogue, workshops, conferences...BAPN always tries to involve the people experiencing poverty.

The Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, which is organized by the Federal Administration for Social Integration is a very important forum. BAPN ensures each time to associate members living in poverty in active preparation and participation to these meetings.

One main workgroup was created in line with the EU 2020 goals and is logically called WG EU 2020.

A second workgroup follows-up the federal policy, mainly regarding homelessness and minimum income.

The workgroup EU 2020 had a lot of reunions in 2016 where the members dealt with European issues and prepared European meetings.

The subjects of attention were:

- European convention
- EU 2020 goals
- Country specific analysis regarding the EU 2020 goals
- The European Pillar on Social Rights - consultation European Commission
- Preparation PEP-meeting

In April 2016 a delegation of the EU 2020 workgroup visited the European Parliament in Strasbourg. It was organised by Walloon Anti-Poverty Network. After the visit of the Parliament in Strasbourg, the same network planned a visit in the Parliament in Brussels.

There was also a meeting planned with Belgian MEP's.

The European Semester, the macro-economic analysis on year basis, is a key process to follow-up the policy of the European Commission.

4. DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH ON THE NETWORK

BAPN has worked in 2016 on the sustainability of its network.

As the coordinator of BMIN, BAPN gathered the regional anti-poverty networks and other stakeholders of BMIN, to repeat and remind to the federal government its engagement, set out in the government agreement, to increase the minimum income schemes above the European threshold. And that cannot be forgotten.

Besides this network, there were a lot of collaborations between BAPN and other associations concerned by the situation of poor people. Those collaborations were based on common interest or theme, such as homelessness, housing, income, access to justice, to health...

When a public statement had to be made, BAPN organised with its partners a press release.

BAPN also communicated with its network through the website and a newsletter.

5. GOVERNANCE AND INTERNAL DEMOCRACY

BAPN is mainly financed on annual base by the Federal Secretary of State of the Fight against poverty. It guarantees the functioning of BAPN and allows the engagement of 3 collaborators (2,5 Equivalent full time)

The board is the decision-making body (indicated in chapter one) which orientates the mission of BAPN. It gathers every trimester. It's mainly composed of representatives of the regionals networks and one representative of persons experiencing poverty.

The everyday management is delegate to a Bureau which comes together every month.

General Assembly formally exists but have to be reinforced as well as the Board: there will be open to two or more full right representatives of PEP and to some "civil society leaders"...

The team is fully associate to the discussions of the Board.

The team put in place assures the daily work of BAPN, each time it is possible with the support of regionals networks and the direct implication of the WG of PEP. The team is composed by one coordinator, one policy officer and a administrative collaborator