

ANNUAL REPORT EAPN BULGARIA 2016

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

Representatives of EAPN Bulgaria are officially members of different advisory bodies in Bulgaria and took active part in their activities in 2016:

- National Council for Social Exclusion at the Council of Ministers engaged with the anti-poverty strategy, adopting reports and plans for the next year

- Working Group on Minimum salary at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The activities in 2016 were linked mainly with looking for an appropriate methodology to establish minimum salary level.

- Working Group on Social Economy. The activities in 2016 were linked with the elaboration of Social Economy and Social Enterprise Law.

- In 2016 we took part as well in a specific interdepartmental group for evaluating and selecting municipalities where specific measures for integration of vulnerable groups to be implemented.

The basic topics we worked in 2016 were energy poverty; youth inclusion and education; public opinion towards refugees; short-term labour emmigration; the problems of the pension system with the very low amounts of pensions; anti-discrimination practices

1.1. Monitoring of energy poverty and energy policy – a discussion on monitoring the providers and bills took place involving universities' representatives. A media presentation was made as well on 21 November at the National Radio

1.2. Youth social inclusion issues and policies - In 2016 we made discussions on the problems of the labour market. In this regard we met with young unemployed people from different localities and a meetings with representatives of the Employment Agency was arranged;

1.3. Education policy – we met with students from different schools (in Sofia, Pernic and Plovdiv) discussing their future plans and prospects as well as the opportunities for young people to be employed in some sectors of the industry; A vision was presented in media on the public policies in education (21.02 Glassove);

1.4. Another important topic is the public attitude to refugees especially in regions near the borders (Gotse Delchev and Haskovo regions)

1.5. Working poor were addressed through different subtopics, for example: a) short term labour emigration (Gotse Delchev and Sandanski region) and discrimination and anti-discrimination labour practices. Different media presentations were prepared (26 January, 2016 on Working poor on the National Radio and on 8 August BGnes; “One in five Bulgarians live below the poverty line, etc.)

1.6. Pensions: the activities included development of visions on how to increase pensions in the country and preparation of the Bulgarian delegation for the EU PEP meeting together with an organization of retirees. Media presentation was prepared for the newspaper “Third age”.

1.7. Other important activities included monitoring on: a) anti-discrimination practices; b) dynamics in the standard of living in the last two decades; c) dynamics in the expenses for healthcare and education.

All the above-mentioned activities were widely covered in the media - in various programs of national and local radio and TV and newspapers. They contributed to the further development of already established relationships with NGOs and Trade Unions and creating links with other NGOs.

1.8. EAPN Bulgaria was involved as well in the elaboration of different national and international applications linked to Roma strategy; adult education; migrants and refugees, including health, etc. Unfortunately these applications were unsuccessful.

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

The direct or indirect participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is characteristic for all the activities of EAPN Bulgaria.

In connection with PEP Meeting in 2016 EAPN Bg activities were focused on the topics of quality of life of retirees as the pensions of many retirees in the country are extremely low and they survive with much difficulties. In this regard a position was developed to support the activities of civil society organizations.

Additionally, in 2016 EAPN Bulgaria continued its efforts to support and develop what we consider a mainstream of poor people involvement in the fight against poverty – that is policy analyses, including Social impact assessments of different policies and measures. Another very important problem are the lacking mechanisms to discuss and present the public opinion of

different groups of people, especially poor people. Within this frame an important axis is to involve different groups of poor people in the assessments of policies and to raise public awareness about the results of this work. The topics under consideration in 2016 defined the groups of people we involved in different activities – young people unemployed and in precarious jobs; students in secondary and higher education; working poor; retirees; old people; people on social assistance.

Different discussions were organized with the different groups of people linked to standard of living and ways to overcome difficulties, including policy proposals.

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

In 2016 EAPN Bulgaria continued to intensify its relations with other social actors:

- a. Trade unions, attempting to develop stronger and more sustainable alliances with.
- b. Universities and research institutions
- c. Activities connected with preparation and follow-up to the European and National Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty. In 2016 we mainly worked with different organizations of retirees.

EAPN Bulgaria consists of NGOs and individuals who work together on a voluntary basis and share common values: - the existence of poverty in Bulgaria is both unacceptable and inadequate to the current economic growth; - policies have to be assessed from the point of view of poverty generators and excluding mechanisms; -the fight against poverty and social exclusion means active participation in decision making processes;

It could be said the network consists of 3 layers:

The first one – is a group of likely minded people and the NGOs they work with. This is a group of around 15 NGOs and 20 individuals. They work for and with quite different vulnerable groups (children, women, ethnic minorities, disabled, mentally ill, unemployed, etc.) and are engaged in different activities (lobbying, provision of information, service provision, researches, etc.). However small and authentic NGOs are under strong pressure in Bulgaria as they almost do not receive any funding and voluntary activities are undertaken on unregularly basis.

The second layer – consists of many NGOs we work with on temporarily basis depending on the concrete tasks at different moments (for example on the mentioned above topics).

These could be called floating coalitions. We consider this direction extremely important and most promising not only and even not mainly because of the lack of core funding for EAPN Bulgaria activities. There are two important reasons for this:

a) The specific social economic context has colored specifically big NGOs, networks and umbrella organizations in Bulgaria. Public opinion, sometimes, consider them as specific generator of the situation and poverty in the country, as financial sustainability is at the expense of providing specific activities to support the situation.

b) Floating coalitions provide effectiveness and impact on a particular occasion and avoid internal conflicts, differences in visions, internal competition and allow the different organizations to follow their internal values and activities without the pressure for similarities.

There is a third layer as well – big organizations with which we build alliances from years on specific activities like the 2 basic trade-unions, Economic and Social Council, etc.

EAPN Bulgaria does not receive core funding. Different activities are project based. There are plenty of activities that are either voluntary (not paid) or covered during accomplishment of different projects by different EAPN Bulgaria members.

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

EAPN BG activities are open, transparent, welcoming inputs and involving different people to shape visions, to influence internal decisions and to develop further the network.

The membership in the NN is open on the condition that the applicants share the values cited above.

However as the NN work is basically voluntary and unpaid, as we don't receive any funding for the numerous network's activities, the opportunities for investing time and efforts by different people are unfortunately quite restricted. As already mentioned, outside plenty voluntary activities where NGOs and people participate whenever possible, what we try when appropriate, to link the activities of the network to the work on project basis. Of course these efforts have their own limits as there are not always projects and when there are they have their own objectives and the network's activities must comply with this.

List of member organizations 2016

1. NGO Anti-Poverty Information Centre (coordinating unit)
2. Perspektiva Foundation
3. Alternativa 2000
4. Club “Society 2015”
5. Cultural Association “Styanka Sokolova”
6. Forum for Sustainable Development “Focus”
7. Centre for social and economic projects, labor and education for research, information and documentation
8. Roma Parliament (uniting different Roma organizations)
9. Society for all Ages
10. Citizen Club “Citizenship and Ethics”
11. Foundation Mecemvria
12. Association for disabled people
13. Association “Women and mothers against violence”
14. Foundation Psychohronist
15. Association Interethnic Dialogue
16. Association “Future 21”

Partnerships on different occasions depending on the topic concerned:

1. Confederation of Independent Trade-Unions (CITUB)
2. Confederation of Labor “Podkrepa” (CL “Podkrepa)
3. Bulgarian Foundation for Gender Research (BWL)
4. Union of Retirees – 2004
5. National Association of Retirees
6. Union of economists in Bulgaria
7. National Alliance for social responsibility
8. Foundation “Blue bird”
9. Association “Best 2 be”
10. National association of employers of people with disabilities
11. Alliance for children and young people
12. Solidarity Bulgaria