

EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK (EAPN) FINAL DECLARATION GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2017

Dublin, 21 Oct 2017

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF EUROPE HOLD FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY?

Almost 100 delegates of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), representing 31 National Networks and 13 European Organisations met in Dublin, at our annual General Assembly. We meet at a time when Europe, in the opinion of the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has the ‘Wind in its Sails’, as highlighted in the State of the Union address in September.

We are cautiously optimistic, recognising the importance and potential impact of the proposed **European Pillar of Social Rights, with the upcoming inter-institutional proclamation at the Social Summit in Gothenburg** as an important milestone which could establish the foundations for upward social convergence on EU social standards, and create more political impetus to meaningfully combat poverty and social exclusion.

However, even if a slight reduction of the number of EU citizens living at risk of poverty and social exclusion was announced this week by Eurostat, there are a number of developments which temper our optimism, notably:

- **An uncertain European political future.** The implications of Brexit are still not clear, politically or financially. Until Brexit negotiations have concluded and there is clarity around the ‘divorce bill’ there is still a risk that people experiencing poverty and social exclusion will be the first to suffer from this political setback.
- **An uncertain European financial future.** Negotiations on the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework are already starting. It is not clear if fighting poverty, as most EU citizens demand, will be at the centre of the discussions.
- **An EU economic model and governance system which prioritizes stability, growth and competitiveness** instead of people, social inclusion and cohesion, and continues to drive austerity attacks to our welfare states rather than investing in social rights and social protection.
- **The continuous and growing level of political populism.** Regular speeches and actions which treat the EU as part of the problem, once again, risk repeating historical mistakes. The lack of recognition of the value of the EU, particularly amongst people with low education levels, unemployed, and those who suffer the most economic difficulties, is one of the biggest challenges faced by the EU.
- **Rising inequality.** The richest one percent of Europeans (including non-EU countries) hold almost a third of the region’s wealth, while the bottom 40% of the population share less than 1% of Europe’s total net wealth. In other words: the richest seven million people in Europe have the same amount of wealth as the poorest 662 million people (including non-EU countries).
- **Ongoing failure to tackle the root causes of poverty and social exclusion.** It is incomprehensible and unacceptable that almost 120 million Europeans are still living at risk of poverty and social exclusion. We should not expect that the same “recipe”, that brought us to this situation, will be able to tackle the structural causes of this problem.

In response to these concerns, members of EAPN declare that:

a) The lack of trust from many European citizens in the European institutions means that it is imperative for the **discussions about the future of Europe to show these institutions care about the almost 25% of citizens living at risk of poverty, solidarity and the protection of the people living in vulnerable conditions.** These discussions are an opportunity to reorient the European project towards its original objective: peace and social cohesion. In the coming months, our leaders must make show political determination to make a definitive step forward in this direction by agreeing on a mandatory implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights – and not only for the Eurozone.

b) **The next Multi-Annual Financial Framework must include a specific budget line on Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion,** to ensure that the highest levels of political and financial priorities are given to this fight. This budget line must support a **comprehensive EU Strategy to fight poverty, exclusion and inequalities able to influence coherent, articulated and coordinated national and local strategies.**

c) **Inequality is not just about wealth, but reflects economic and political power.** Extreme economic inequality, and fiscal fraud allowed within fiscal paradises, corrupts politics, reduces media freedom, hinders economic growth and stifles social mobility. It fuels crime and violent conflict, and stands in the way of the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Change will only come if governments take deliberate action to redistribute wealth, and put a range of progressive policies in place before economic inequality is past the point of no return. Through their current macroeconomic and fiscal policies, EU governments and Institutions are serving the interests and preferences of the wealthy. We call on European leaders to introduce national and regional plans on reducing inequalities, which should include ensuring an adequate income from quality work or income support/social protection, reducing the wage gap between the wealthy and the working poor, redefining our tax systems, increasing tax on wealth, capital and profits of the richest companies and individuals, and implementing progressive tax systems that ensures each company and individual pays their fair share of taxes, and tackling tax secrecy, tax havens and illicit financial flows that allow billions of dollars of tax dodging each year, strangling public budgets needed to fund vital public services and pushing people into poverty.

d) **It is simply unacceptable for Europe, with the wealth available in our continent, to allow these levels of poverty and social exclusion** – especially when our leaders agreed, in 2015, under the auspices of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, to eradicate extreme poverty and halve poverty in all its dimensions, according to national definitions. We need to go beyond the Europe 2020 target that has failed to deliver, agreeing on an ambitious target based on common EU indicators. Poverty and social exclusion are common recognised as a denial of fundamental human rights and a failure to respect and protect human dignity. Enough is enough – the time has come for political leaders in Europe to rethink our Europe and to put an end to this scourge of poverty and social exclusion. Concretely, we call on European leaders to put in place a Golden Rule establishing minimum social protection spending at adequate levels, as a key way to tackle poverty and social exclusion. We also call on leaders to make progress on a framework directive on adequate minimum income, as a concrete instrument to implement the EPSR.

e) **Meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty and their organisations has to be at the heart of the design, delivery and monitoring processes of social rights,** standards and poverty reduction. Fighting poverty is not just about improving the lives of people experiencing poverty, it is about securing transparency and democracy, of which political participation is a key part. We demand to be treated as equal, and valuable partners in dialogue processes at national and EU level, including the European Semester, as the main EU policy coordination instrument.



f) The UK Government must **retain all accrued economic and social rights as a member of the European Union**, and make a firm commitment that all of the economic and social rights under the Repeal Bill are kept.

For further information, contact **Leo Williams** (Director) leo.williams@eapn.eu, or **Elke Vandermeerschen** (Communications Officer), elke.vandermeerschen@eapn.eu | Tel. +32 2 226 58 50

EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK
RESEAU EUROPEEN DES ASSOCIATIONS DE LUTTE CONTRE LA PAUVRETE ET L'EXCLUSION SOCIALE
BOULEVARD BISCHOFFSHEIM, 11 – 1000 BRUXELLES – TEL: 0032 2 226 58 50 – FAX: 0032 2 226 58 69
www.eapn.eu - team@eapn.eu – Twitter [@EAPNEurope](https://twitter.com/EAPNEurope) - [EAPN on Facebook](#)

