

Annual report from EAPN Iceland for 2017

2.1. Influence National Governments for Better Policies: Advocacy, Lobbying and Policy-Making linked to European level developments

We continue to have a good working relationship with the Ministry of Welfare and held two conferences in cooperation with the Ministry. The first one was on September 15th on the issues of debt and poverty, and the latter was on November 16th on in-work poverty (carrying on the theme of the annual PeP meeting in Brussels).

PeP has a representative on the Welfare Watch (Bergþór Heimir, and Ásta Dís as a substitute). Vilborg is also a member, but on behalf of her organization, The Church Aid. This allows us to keep up with the work of the Watch and enables us to directly influence policy.

PeP also had an active dialogue with politicians, both on national and municipal level. On March 2nd PeP organized a special viewing of the British film “I, Daniel Blake” in cooperation with independent film theatre “Bíó Paradís” and the Icelandic Disability Alliance (Öryrkjabandalag Íslands) which is also an EAPN member. All members of Parliament got an invite to the viewing and afterwards there was a panel discussion on poverty and work assessment programs, which were being discussed in parliament at the time in connection to a bill that had been heavily criticized by the Disability alliance. Only 3 MPs turned out for the viewing, as well as one deputy MP, but the discussion was successful nonetheless.

On the 17th of October PeP invited candidates for the then upcoming government elections to a soup-lunch and discussion on poverty. The event was a great success and all candidates signed an agreement on fighting poverty in all areas and address the issue with dignity and respect for those affected.

We have also built connections with the media through our participation in the Austrian network’s “Journalism Prize from Below”. On February 23rd we had our first award ceremony where four journalists got prizes for their professional coverage of poverty and 8 more received certificates of nomination. On December 13th we had a media workshop attended by some of our prize winners along with academics and PePs.

PeP also cooperated with media, artists and national campaigns on poverty. The trade unions’ May 1st campaign included interviews with PePs and radio programme on National Radio 1 “Poor people” (Fátækt fólk) made by journalist/writer Mikael Trofason had a coverage of PeP with some interviews as well. Also, actress Olivía Hrönn included a story of one PeP member in a staging at the National theatre (Þjóðleikhúsið) and spoke of her experience attending PeP meetings on stage. The play was a political parody with some hard truths about society and the treatment of poor people throughout the centuries in Iceland.

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

We have made the work of our PeP network the center of our work and this has been very successful as it makes our work more relatable. In our opinion our work means very little without the voices and participation of the people we are fighting to empower and our work should be aimed at this group.

An essential part of including PePs is to rally for solidarity through participation, which means involving people in the network, asking them to organize projects and events. We also encourage them to speak out on their experiences and our events all include a speaker (or speakers) with experience of poverty as well as public officials, politicians and academics.

Building the network in municipalities outside of Reykjavík is an ongoing project and our network in Akureyri has been the most active one. We attended “The People’s Meeting” on September 8th and 9th, which was held in Akureyri, mobilizing the local PeP members. We had a workshop on poverty on the second day of the meeting, having a dialogue with politicians and locals on the public image and perception of poverty.

We had five official PeP meetings throughout the year and two “barbeques” in Kriki, which is a summer house owned by Sjalfsbjörg, one of our member organizations.

On August 17th PeP participated in The Radical Summer University’s program with a workshop on poverty, public image and perception where 3 PeP members spoke of their experiences of fighting the social welfare system and getting by on a budget way below minimum living standards.

Two of our PeP representatives from 2017 are now public/political representatives. Sólveig Anna Jónsdóttir was one of our registered delegates for the PeP meeting in Brussels on the working poor. She was at the time working as an “unskilled” worker at a Reykjavík nursery/preschool and had been very vocal on the low wages offered by municipalities for those working with children. Unfortunately Sólveig broke her shoulder so she could not make the trip with the Icelandic delegation to Brussels in November, but while recovering she ran for the position of president of her union, Efling (the second largest trade union in Iceland, and the largest representing low wage and unskilled workers), and won. Another PeP representative, Sanna Magdalena Mörtudóttir, who has spoken on a few of our workshops on her experiences as a child growing up in poverty, ran for Reykjavík City Council and got in as a sole representative for the Socialist Party.

2.3. Development and Growth of the Network

2.3.1 Growth

Our focus on growth has mainly been through participation of PeP members and expanding our work with visibility of people in poverty and with the experience of poverty. Programs with direct participation have been the most successful, for example the participation in Breiðholtsbrúin (“Breiðholt Bridge”), where one of our PeP members has helped with cooking and organizing in cooperation with the city of Reykjavík and other local organizations.

The EMIN project has also helped us expand our work and we will continue to participate in that as long as we can have funding to do so.

Also, we have been focused on growing on the national level, mobilizing the Akureyri network to organize local events. Our aim has been to establish networks in more areas but this will take yet some more work and organizing.

2.3.2 Training and capacity building

Sending PeP members to meetings organized by EAPN has been useful to mobilize PeP members. To meet with others and get involved with the European level work gives PeP members a better idea of how our work is structured and increases drive and enthusiasm to carry on the work.

Direct involvement in project organizing is also a good factor and the Journalism Prize has been useful for this purpose.

2.4. Good Governance and Strong Internal Democracy

2.4.1 Strong Internal Democracy

Our annual general meeting is held every year before the end of April (according to our statutes) and was held on April 18th at the offices of one of our member organizations, Sjálfsbjörg. The attendance was good. We read out a summary of the work throughout the year and there were no changes made on the board.

2.4.2 Management of workers and volunteers/activists

We had several new PeP members added to the work that year, including people involved in grass root politics and those who work with political parties. This has established connections with other organizations and given us a voice inside political parties, even in policy making and commenting on bills being addressed and passed by Parliament.

2.4.3 Strategic Planning/Thinking

Our work on building connections with politics, organizations, the media, public offices and ministries has made us stronger as a network and we are getting recognized on a wider level. This gives more weight to our network and we will continue to build and strengthen those types of connections.

Our website and our social media accounts (we have one for EAPN Iceland and one for PeP Iceland) are an ongoing project and we need to establish a clear direction for the promotion and representation of our work through these channels. Having a good website and active social media presence is vital for visibility of the network, and also as a means to engage with civil society.

The media is also vital to us for visibility, and being able to give them constructive criticism through the media prize project as well as being their go-to source on the issue of poverty, is valuable to our work. We will continue to strengthen those connections.

2.4.4 Funding

We have had some funding from the Welfare Ministry as well as from the EAPN. We continue to seek ways to get more funding from different sources.