

14 January 2020

Mr Sassoli, President of the European Parliament
Mr Verhofstadt, Chair of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Dear Mr Sassoli, Mr Verhofstadt

Re. European Parliament, the Future of Europe Conference and the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty

For almost 20 years, the European Anti-Poverty Network and DG Employment have worked together, often with the Presidencies of the European Council and the European Parliament, to organise an annual [European meeting of People Experiencing Poverty](#), where at least 120 citizens with direct experience of poverty come together in Brussels, following a period of national level deliberations, to share their insights and experiences with decision makers and influencers at the European level. The meetings provide a space for people experiencing poverty across Europe to use their knowledge and analysis of poverty and exclusion to contribute to key areas of social justice such as: **adequacy of income, child poverty, housing and homelessness, indebtedness, the links between discrimination and poverty, the impact of liberalization of public services, decent work, progress made on achieving the EU poverty reduction target, in-work poverty and most recently the link between poverty and education.**

The meetings are a concrete example of bridging the gap between the European Union and its citizens. They provide early warning signs of negative trends impacting on poverty and social cohesion, and highlight positive practices emerging in different countries. The meetings are an empowering experience for people experiencing poverty, and many participants go on to play important roles in anti-poverty organisations and take further actions in their communities. The meetings were conceived as a contribution to the OMC on Social Inclusion and they continue to contribute to key EU debates and policy frameworks such as the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In November 2019, the 18th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty highlighted five political priorities that people experiencing poverty would like to see on the agenda of the new European Institutions: **Access to Housing; Participation of people experiencing poverty in the lives of their communities and societies; Access to adequate Minimum Income; Access to good quality health care services; Access to decent jobs and equal employment opportunities.**

Participants had prepared their national level priorities with their national EAPN networks in advance, and came together to agree on key demands with people experiencing poverty from all over Europe. You will find the key demands in the attached document.

EAPN is accountable to participants in the PeP meeting, and we aim to report back to them in 2020 how the European Institutions react to their political priorities, as part of the democratic process. With this in mind, we'd like to ask two simple questions based on the priorities of the meeting:



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

1. How will the European Parliament ensure that priorities identified by people experiencing poverty will be at the heart of their discussions and decision making process?
2. What concrete initiatives does the Parliament have planned in relation to the priorities coming out of the 2019 meeting?

We are also following closely the plans for the Future of Europe conference, given our previous work on this (including [our position paper](#) and our contribution to the written consultation). We welcome the Parliaments' desire to "closely involve citizens in a bottom-up exercise" to listen to the voices of citizens and, in the long run to have a "permanent mechanisms for engaging with the citizens in the reflection on the future of Europe". However, we would strongly suggest that organised civil society needs to have a clearer and more meaningful role, rather than simply being referred to as 'a key element of this innovative and original process' (para. 5 of the Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe) and as providing support to the Conference process and various bodies (para. 18).

As mentioned above, for 18 years EAPN, in collaboration with the European Commission (and on occasions also with the Parliament) has been organising a bottom-up exercise to understand the priorities of hundreds of vulnerable citizens throughout Europe - via the European PeP meetings. Given the importance to engaging citizens in a bottom up process, **we would like to propose that, in 2020 and 2021, the Future of Europe conference should incorporate the People Experiencing Poverty meeting into its process. The Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe proposes several thematic citizens' agoras to reflect on the priorities – we suggest that, with the PeP meeting, the basis of a citizens' agora on social justice and equality already exists, and could be used to provide this reflection directly.**

We would be very happy to meet with you both to discuss these matters. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Carlos Susias

EAPN President

Leo Williams

EAPN Director

