THE TIME IS

18TH EUROPEAN MEETING OF
PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

EAPN
EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

PeP

EUROPEAN MEETINGS OF
PEOPLE
EXPERIENCING
POVERTY

LISTEN TO THE EXPERTS OF POVERTY, EXCLUSION AND INEQUALITIES

INTRODUCTION

The theme for the 18th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty (PEP Meeting) was **The Time is Now**. The event took place at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Brussels, on 18-19 November, and was organised by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) with financial support from the European Commission, the Finnish Presidency of the European Council, and the EAPN Fund.

The conference brought together **almost 150 participants**, including national delegations of people experiencing poverty (PEP) from 32 countries, policy makers and representatives of European non-governmental organizations working towards eliminating poverty.

Taking place right at the beginning of a new term of the European Commission (EC) and Parliament, the meeting came at an important moment and gave an excellent opportunity for people experiencing poverty to speak up and present their political priorities in **five key areas**:

- **Access to housing;**
- **Participation in societies;**
- **Access to adequate minimum income;**
- **Access to good quality health care services;**
- **Access to decent jobs and employment opportunities.**

PEP meetings have been organized yearly since 2000, therefore the history of these meetings was also presented. There are still 110 million people in poverty across the EU, therefore it is important to raise awareness about the persistent challenges that PEP face and outline the priorities they want to see on the agenda of the new EC.

This short report aims to highlight the key demands developed by PEP and presented to policy makers at the meeting. The expectation is that the political leaders present at the meeting will include these key demands in their priorities and will act on them!

"[The] PEP Meeting is NOT a business meeting!
This is about people's lives and they deserve to be heard".
Participant from EAPN Spain
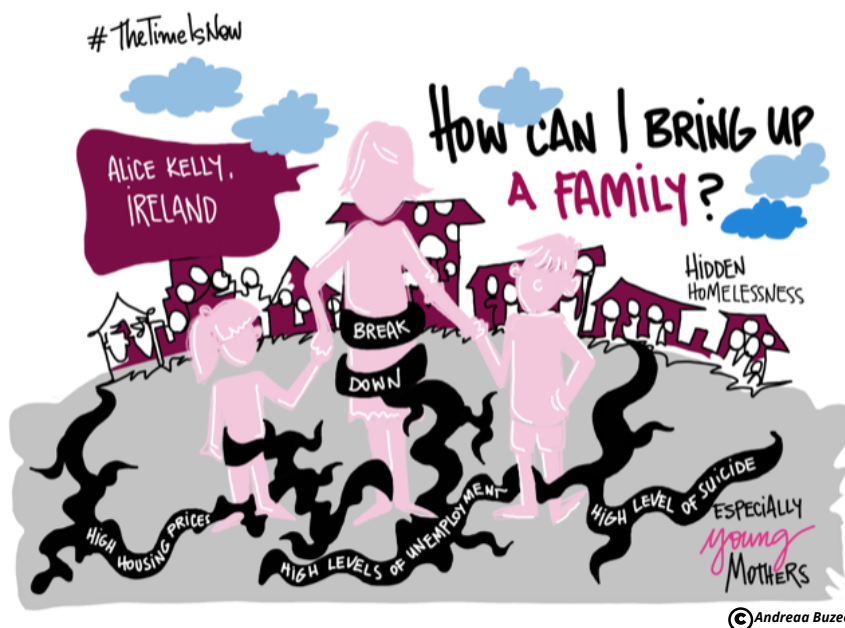
THE TIME IS NOW

MAIN MOMENTS OF THE MEETING

THE OPENING PLENARY

The opening plenary featured 3 powerful testimonies made by PEP from Ireland - **Alice Kelly**, Greece - **Samba Diallo**, and Finland - **Linnéa Partanen**.

The policy makers present - **Dragos Pislaru**, Member of the European Parliament, Renew Europe Group and **Josefine Hederström**, Acting Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit, DG Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission - responded to the 3 stories shared by PEP and outlined how they see the role of the newly elected Parliament and the EC in dealing with the challenges faced by Alice, Samba and Linnéa.

This debate was co-facilitated by **Vera Hinterdorfer**, EAPN Austria and EAPN Vice-President and **Leo Williams**, EAPN Director.

Andreaa Buzec

THE WORLD CAFÉ

After the opening plenary, participants split into smaller groups in order to have more in-depth conversations about the 5 priorities discussed at the meeting.

The discussions were facilitated using the World Café methodology and they were a crucial step in the development of the key demands presented by the PEP.

© *Andreaa Buzec*

THE WORKSHOPS

After two rounds of World Café discussions, participants gathered in 5 groups, around the 5 priorities discussed at the meeting. Each of the 5 groups proposed, on the basis of the collective analysis done during the World Café sessions, key demands that they wanted policy makers to hear and act on.

THE VISIBILITY ACTION

This year's visibility action took place at Place Rogier on the 19th of November with the clear intention of amplifying the voices of people experiencing poverty attending the PEP Meeting and raising awareness of poverty and social exclusion in Europe by targeting the general public and key stakeholders and policy makers.

The goal was to make sure that everybody knew that the Time is now to make Europe Poverty Free! It was done through music with the **song the Time is Now** as well as **handing out Christmas cards with messages from PEP from different countries** that were prepared by each National Delegation in advance of the meeting. The action ended on a high note with **forming the word NOW on the square** whilst chanting *"Eh Eh Oh Oh, Poverty has to go".*

THE CLOSING PLENARY

The key demands developed by more than a 100 people with direct experience of poverty were presented in a plenary session with high level policy makers:

- **Nicolas Schmit,** Commissoner for Jobs and Social Rights
- **Saila Ruuth**, State Secretary of Social Affairs and Health, Finland
- **Pierfrancesco Majorino**, Member of the European Parliament, S&D group, involved in restarting the intergroup on poverty.

Their responses to the demands presented stirred some further debate with the audience.

The Meeting ended with its traditional evaluation where participants shared their feedback on the two days.

KEY POLITICAL PRIORITIES

The World Café discussions as well as the workshops led to the definition and formulation of three to four key messages for each priority.

EMPLOYMENT
- INTEGRATED SUPPORT
- QUALITY, RELEVANT TRAINING
- COMBAT LOW PAY & UNPAID WORK

HEALTHCARE
- GUARANTEE GOOD QUALITY HEALTHCARE IN ALL LIFE SITUATIONS
- FIGHT PRIVATISATION & MARKETISATION
- OVERCOME LACK OF POLITICAL WILL

HOUSING
- ADEQUATE & DECENT SOCIAL HOUSING
- MAKE PRIVATE & DECENT HOUSING AFFORDABLE
- ADDRESS SPECULATION

PARTICIPATION
- REAL DIALOGUE WITH PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY
- REAL LISTENING TO THE REAL NEEDS
- INVESTMENTS IN SPACES & RESOURCES

MINIMUM INCOME
- PERSON CENTERED SUPPORT
- EU DIRECTIVE CORRELATED
- NO MORE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING MI

© Andreaa Buzec

ACCESS TO HOUSING

1. ENSURE PEP HAVE ACCESS TO DECENT SOCIAL HOUSING

Access to decent housing is very important for everybody. If you lose your home, you risk losing your social benefits, and this might lead to losing your children.

Having decent social housing at affordable rents lets people have stability, dignity, employment, health, education and family unity. To improve access to decent housing, especially for people experiencing poverty, we need:

- Enough quality social housing in all Member States
- Dedicated focus on those who cannot afford to rent a house
- Participation of people in need of housing in decision making processes related to housing situations (e.g. in national, regional or local governments, or in local councils) ·
- A European Indicator to monitor and compare social housing policies in different EU Member States, with the aim of increasing European understanding and comparability of how social housing works in different countries.

2. MAKE DECENT PRIVATE HOUSING AFFORDABLE

Provide incentives for owners to make their houses available for renting to people experiencing poverty, including by taxing vacant houses, establishing a rent cap in major cities and having a compulsory percentage of social housing in major housing developments.

3. ADDRESS SPECULATION ON THE HOUSING MARKET BY REGULATING IT

4. TREAT HOUSING AS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT AND NOT AS A FINANCIAL GOOD

'What can you do to have access to housing? Just don't throw people in the street.'
Participant from EAPN Ireland

PARTICIPATION OF PEP IN THE LIVES OF THEIR COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETIES

2ND PRIORITY

"What was most important for me was that they listened to me. It is so important to be listened to. Make yourself visible."
Participant from EAPN Netherland

People experiencing poverty can provide efficient and cost-effective solutions in many areas that concern their lives – but false participation organised in a top-down way must stop. Bottom-up participation must be based on real dialogue with people experiencing poverty. This needs attention, investment (time, space, money) and real listening to real needs.

1. **WE NEED GOVERNMENTS AND EU INSTITUTIONS TO TRUST PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY AND MAKE THEM MORE VISIBLE**

2. **WE NEED THE STIGMATIZATION OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY TO STOP**

3. **WE NEED GOVERNMENTS AND EU INSTITUTIONS TO MAKE SOLID INVESTMENTS IN PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY, IN TERMS OF TIME, SPACE AND RESOURCES, IN ORDER TO EMPOWER PEOPLE, BUILD STRUCTURES AND BUILD CAPACITY**

4. **WE NEED GOVERNMENTS AND EU INSTITUTIONS TO INTRODUCE REQUIREMENTS TO MEANINGFULLY ENGAGE PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY IN RELEVANT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES WHICH AFFECT THEIR LIVES (E.G. DEVELOPMENT OF ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGIES) AND HAVE CLEAR CRITERIA FOR WHAT COUNTS AS MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY**

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE MINIMUM INCOME

Minimum income is a foundation for social justice and social justice is a foundation for social peace and a more equal society. Dignity and respect should underpin all minimum income schemes in Europe. Asking and involving people who need minimum income schemes should be a core part of designing and monitoring minimum income schemes.

1.   WE NEED AN EU DIRECTIVE TO GUARANTEE THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE MINIMUM INCOME, WITH ADEQUACY DEFINED IN RELATION TO:

- National Reference budgets – capturing the income needed for a dignified life, through a common calculation of a basket of goods and services
- The 'at risk of poverty' threshold: the level should be above 60% of median disposable household income

2.   WE NEED THE EU TO ENSURE THAT MEMBER STATES REMOVE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING MINIMUM INCOME FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS – E.G. MIGRANTS AND HOMELESS PEOPLE, DUE TO LACK OF ID PAPERS AND RESIDENCE PERIOD REQUIREMENTS FOR EXAMPLE

3. WE NEED GOVERNMENTS TO ENSURE PERSON CENTERED SUPPORT THAT AVOIDS PUNITIVE CONDITIONALITY AND PROVIDES CONCRETE PATHWAYS TO QUALITY JOBS THAT PAY A REASONABLE WAGE

"The complexity of the system together with the difficulty to have access to relevant information makes it a complex task to know what allowances one is entitled to."
Participant from EAPN Belgium

ACCESS TO GOOD QUALITY HEALTH CARE SERVICES

> *"People that have money have a choice. People with no money, what are they going to do?"*
> **Participant from EAPN Luxembourg**

1. WE NEED THE EU AND GOVERNMENTS TO GUARANTEE GOOD QUALITY HEALTHCARE FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS (E.G. HOMELESS, ROMA, UNEMPLOYED) IN ALL LIFE SITUATIONS BY:

- Overcoming urban-rural divides and differences
- Strongly considering the gender division (e.g. single women, pregnant women)
- Giving more attention to mental health issues
- Improving the reimbursement of dental care

2. WE NEED GOVERNMENTS TO FIGHT AND REVERSE PRIVATIZATION AND MARKETISATION OF HEALTH CARE BY:

- Keeping universal access and coverage
- Strengthening access and reducing long waiting time and lists

3. WE NEED GOVERNMENTS TO OVERCOME THE LACK OF POLITICAL WILL TO IMPLEMENT AND USE THE EXISTING LEGISLATION:

- Apply legislation or rules on non-discrimination, staffing or reimbursement of costs
- Governments and public institutions in health must be accountable to people

ACCESS TO DECENT JOBS AND EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

1. WE NEED PERSONALIZED, INTEGRATED SUPPORT ALONG THE LINES OF COMPREHENSIVE "ACTIVE INCLUSION", WITH ADEQUATE INCOME SUPPORT HELPING PEOPLE TRANSITION INTO DECENT JOBS. THIS SUPPORT SHOULD BE PROVIDED THROUGH SIMPLIFIED BUREAUCRACY AND CLEAR INFORMATION

2. WE NEED QUALITY, RELEVANT TRAINING FOR WORKERS (PAID FOR BY EMPLOYERS DURING WORKING HOURS) AND JOBSEEKERS

3. WE NEED GOVERNMENTS AND EU INSTITUTIONS TO COMBAT LOW PAY AND UNPAID WORK BY SUPPORTING ADEQUATE WAGES WHICH ALLOW FOR A LIFE IN DIGNITY AND ENDING EXPLOITATION, MODERN SLAVERY AND "FORCED VOLUNTEERING" THROUGH UNPAID 'WORKFARE'

"The job centres are not there to help you find work, they are there to make you find work" **Participant from EAPN UK**

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is an independent network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union, established in 1990.

EAPN Fund

managed by the King Baudouin Foundation

European Commission