



Notes for EAPN Webinar on ‘Covid, Poverty and Politics’

Date: Monday 31 March, Time: 11 30 – 13 30

Participants: Magnus (Sweden), Eleni (Cyprus), Iris (Romania), Carlos (Spain), Luigi (SMES), Richard (France), Vito (Italy), Olga (Greece), Freek (FEANTSA), Jo (Netherlands) Kata (Hungary), Biljana (North Macedonia), Ian (IFSW), Neil (UK), Karel / Ivo (Czech Republic), Kamila (Poland), Vera (Austria), Noel (Malta), Aiste (Lithuania), Caroline (Belgium), Kart (Estonia), Anne (Ireland)

Apologies received : Raoul (Luxembourg)

Staff: Leo, Sigrid, Philippe, Magda, Elke, Florence, Sian, Mathias.

1. Objectives of this session

- a) To understand the situation at the national level
- b) To share experiences between members, and get ideas from each other for how to respond to the crisis
- c) To brainstorm on our strategy to protect people experiencing poverty from this crisis

2. National level feedback in 3 breakout groups

Detailed notes of the breakout groups can be found on Members Room, [here](#).

3. Plenary feedback from the groups

	What are the biggest worries your network has for PeP following the Covid crisis? (Short term and long term)	How will your networks respond to these worries?
Group 1 Austria, Netherlands, Sweden, UK, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Spain. Staff : Magda and Sigrid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huge increase in unemployment. 500 000 extra in UK. Only 3 months unemployment benefit in Hungary • Companies are exempt from paying tax throughout the crisis, but there are no such measures to protect people living in poverty (Hungary) • Energy bills and heating bills – PeP can’t pay them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with government to ensure that heating and energy won’t be cut off (Spain) • 38 billion budgeted for Covid – but nothing is dedicated to PeP. Asking for a specific budget for PeP. (Austria)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids who are not in school don't get the meals they would get at school (Sweden), and parents don't have enough to pay for these meals • Lack of internet / printer at home – things like this are increasing inequalities • Increased levels of depressions amongst PeP. Examples of self-isolating PeP not asking for help, not asking people to shop for them because they don't want to tell people only to buy the cheapest food etc. Issues of shame. (Austria) • Unclear when regulations will be put back – risk to democracy (Hungary) • Refugees not included in different measures (Greece) • Food banks don't have enough food! (Netherlands) • Increased domestic violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media towards municipalities and Parliament. Most of money will be paid back after the crisis. Need to avoid these repayments being covered by PeP. (Netherlands) • Push for everyone to be given extra money a month – there is a professor in Germany who is promoting the idea of giving an extra 100 euros per month (Netherlands) • Asking government for updates every 2 weeks as to the measures they are putting in to protect PeP (Spain) • Created a platform for online support and exchange (Austria)
<p>Group 2 France, Norway, Belgium, Italy, Czech Republic, SMES Staff: Philippe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless, people who live in groups - how can they self-isolate? • Isolation will lead to increased loneliness, increased mental health issues and risk of suicide amongst PeP • PeP are stealing from supermarkets as they are hungry and have no money for food (Norway) • People will be without their salaries for a few months, so we will see a big increase in poverty • We need increased protection measures for PeP • Long term – policies need to consider the needs of PeP. • We need to reinforce solidarity between Member States. • Immigrants living in camps – we need more solidarity here, taking into account the European dimension. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belgium has a statement which it has developed, signed by over 100 NGOs. • Norway has developed a press release, asking for better coordination, collecting ideas, and created a declaration. They have weekly meetings to discuss impact on PeP of Covid. • Insisting on personal and political solidarity.
<p>Group 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard for homeless – Malta has high rents so it is v hard, and safe houses not used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FEANTSA is compiling good and bad practise, which can be shared.

Malta, Poland, Romania, FEANTSA, IFSW, Cyprus, Lithuania, Estonia, North Macedonia Staff: Elke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of protective equipment for social workers, doctors etc – this is a big worry • Crisis will lead to an increase in number of people living on low incomes • Crisis will have a big impact on our health systems, as many countries are still coming out of recessions • People in atypical work will be impacted hard • Single parents and carers will be impacted hard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EAPN should press for a more unified response from EU, rather than waiting for countries to respond • Perhaps there is a value in exchanging good and bad practises from our governments, in terms of their social policy reactions.
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4. Plenary brainstorm on our strategy at EU and national level to protect people experiencing poverty from this crisis

Ideas received included:

- At EU level, we need key messages, as well as flexibility to change how and where we deliver these messages, as we move through this crisis **(Ireland)**
- This crisis should be a way to reinvent / evaluate how politics is conducted – we cannot go back to business as usual. If the EU is not visibly promoting solidarity in a meaningful way throughout this, then there is a risk that people will lose even more faith in EU **(Belgium)**
- Clear demand must push the EU to focus not just on protecting the economy and businesses, but also on protecting people directly, specifically the most vulnerable **(Spain)**
- We should be pushing the EU to ensure that democracy is respected and protected in each country **(Spain)**
- There is lots of discussion on salary levels of key workers like nurses in certain countries – there is now more of an acceptance from society that such salaries should be higher. What is very clear is that the poor should not be expected to pay for this – we know that many of the government ‘grants’ will actually be loans, which will have to be paid back at some point – and it is crucial that it is not the poor who are bearing the burden of paying it back. It’s also clear that solidarity, at least between people, is growing between Europe, and this needs to be reflected between governments as well. **(Netherlands)**
- Detailing the best and worst practise EAPN members have seen from their governments throughout this crisis could be useful, both as a tool for our members and to feed into the EU Institutions. **(Spain)**
- EAPN has had a clear demand on minimum income for years – in Spain this now looks like it might be getting traction politically. We could use this as an opportunity to push hard on our messages around minimum income, as Covid19 is really bringing this to the fore now. **(Spain)**

Sian, Policy Coordinator, joined to give an update on recent EU level decisions, notably:

- Council Conclusions from last week triggered the **Escape Clause from the Stability and Growth Pact**, which gives Member States the flexibility to spend large amounts of money in order to support companies and people's incomes throughout the crisis. This is very important.
- Countries could not agree on the so-called 'Corona bonds', this is a loan guarantee system which could have seen richer countries supporting countries who have been most heavily impacted by the crisis. Currently the wealthier countries are not wanting to go down this route -n this risks increasing inequalities between European countries, and undermining any sense of European solidarity.
- We could try to pressure the EU to push MS to ensure that people experiencing poverty are being supported financially as well, rather than simply companies. The EU could make such recommendations through the Semester process, where the EUISG will be putting pressure in the coming weeks.
- None of the major financing lines from the EU are yet fixed – MFF, EU Invest, Just Transition funds – all of this could end up be diverted to fight Covid.
- We should press where we can and where we have expertise, highlighting key problems identified as well as good and bad practise.

Three concrete actions were further discussed, with Ex Co members invited to highlight whether they would like to see EAPN undertake this action:

Potential EAPN Europe action	Yes	No
Compiling good and bad practise across Europe in terms of policy responses from governments	13	0
Offering thematic webinars, where members could hear from each other about the impact of covid on specific areas (for example, SMES could offer a webinar about the impacts of covid on mental health, IFSW on how it is impacting social workers)	5	0
Using covid to push our key messages on minimum income	10	1

It was recognised that while not all members necessarily focus on Minimum Income in their country, it is a clear established priority of EAPN, and we should not be questioning this now, we should be working hard on our established positions. This is a key time to be insisting that governments put money into

people's pockets, recognising the huge hardships being faced now. It was suggested that EAPN Europe, and national networks, could take up the demand for governments to give an extra hundred euros per month to people experiencing poverty, following calls from a German professor and taken up by EAPN Netherlands.

Finally – this discussion is a good start, but it should not be the end of the discussions. It would be useful perhaps to have a small group from the Ex Co working together to help take this forward, defining how we'll work as EAPN, taking into account what is feasible. EAPN Netherlands, Spain and Italy volunteered on this, but we also agreed the following action:

Action	Responsible	Deadline
Send an email out to all Ex Co members, asking the following: a) What good and bad practises can you identify from your governments, in terms of their social policy responses to the crisis b) Is your network interested in joining a small group to take the work forward?	Director	Early April