

## Resolution on the implementation of the strategic review

It is unacceptable that over 118 million people are living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union. EAPN is committed to the eradication of poverty and aims to put the fight against poverty and social exclusion at the top of the political agenda of the EU. The EAPN membership is committed to its vision: “We are working for a Social Europe free of poverty and social exclusion with access to economic, social and cultural rights for all”.

To keep poverty and social exclusion at the top of the political agenda of the EU, a strong European network of national networks and European organisations active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is indispensable.

To give direction to its work, the strategic review was adopted by EAPN’s General Assembly in 2019. Furthermore, during the last AGA and the EXCO meetings in 2019, there was a strong plea of members to shift the focus of EAPN now on advocacy work rather than on internal restructuring and governance. A refocus on advocacy and lobbying is not only necessary, it is also urgent:

- In 2020, the Europe2020-strategy is coming to an end. Figures demonstrate that the poverty target will not be reached. Although, there has been some progress, particularly in a reduction in severe material deprivation, the overall progress has been slow and insufficient. People in poverty across Europe feel left behind, are angry and are losing their faith in Europe and in politics.
- With the Europe2020-strategy coming to an end, the European Semester being revised, a European Green Deal being in the process of development, debates on the Future of the EU taking place and an implementation plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights being underway, strong action of EAPN is needed to ensure that the rights and needs of people experiencing poverty are well reflected in these new strategic and policy documents of the EU, including during their implementation. Several action plans with an important link to poverty are being launch or their launches are being prepared (gender strategy, social economy strategy, migration pact, roma framework, child guarantee, etc.) and EAPN cannot afford not to be involved
- It is clear the EAPN lost some of its profile as an advocacy network – especially in the EU Brussels bubble. Urgent work is required to reestablish EAPNs role as key player in the design and implementation of EU social exclusion policies. The disinvestment in political work has created frustration with a growing number of national and European members, to the point that some EOs consider withdrawing as members.

To implement the strategic review and to shift the focus of our work to achieving the policy changes that are necessary to improve the lives of people experiencing poverty, **the signatories of this resolution are calling upon the director under the guidance of the Bureau and the EXCO to take action on the following recommendations:**

- 1. Reinforce EU policy and advocacy work:** To keep poverty and social exclusion at the top of the political agenda, strong policy and advocacy work towards the EU institutions should be at the heart of our activities. A good structure has been developed to ensure that our policy messages are being built on national realities through the cooperation of the membership within the EUISG. The policy work and outputs of the EUISG are not only beneficial to defend the rights of people experiencing poverty at the EU level, it also supports the national advocacy work of its members towards its national, regional and local governments. But the policy and advocacy work cannot be

limited to the work of the EUISG. There is a huge untapped potential to involve national and European members more and better in the EU advocacy work. EAPN has traditionally been strong in policy and advocacy work. However, in recent years, EAPN has lost part of its strong position in Brussels. For the signatories it is essential that EAPN steps up its policy work to guarantee that our network can secure its place as a key stakeholder towards the EU institutions so that it can effectively influence EU policies.

**We specifically recommend tot:**

- Affirm that EU policy and advocacy work is at the core of our work.
- Strengthen the policy team at the EAPN office in Brussels with an increased number of policy staff. Most European Social NGOs working at Brussels level have at least 3 policy officers, and many have 4 or 5, so the reduction to only 1 coordinator on 4/5 and 1 full time policy officer makes us very weak. Strengthening the EU policy team should be our number one priority when decisions on funding and investments are being made.
- Strengthen the involvement of national and European members in the EU advocacy work, for instance through building and using their relations with national governments (who are represented in the Council of the EU), Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the national desks of the European Commission.
- Build the capacity of national members to support their involvement in EU processes and helping them identify opportunities on how this can support their work at the national level.
- Secure the current resources which are being dedicated to the EUISG and affirm the importance of the policy work done by this group for fulfilling EAPN's main role to influence EU and national policies.
- Involve the director more closely in policy work, among others, as the visible face of EAPN in key European meetings and events.

- 2. Strengthen the position of EAPN as a key actor at the EU level:** To keep poverty and social exclusion at the top of the political agenda, EAPN needs to be recognized and visible as a key actor by the EU institutions and other European stakeholders. EAPN has lost some of its recognition in the last years which has decreased substantially its influence at the EU level. If we want to have an impact on the new strategic and policy documents of the EU which are in the process of being developed and implemented at the moment, it is urgent that EAPN strengthens its position towards the EU and external stakeholders.

**We specifically recommend to:**

- Organise yearly a large high-level policy conference in Brussels when the EXCO and the EUISG meetings are taking place in Brussels . This conference should attract a wide and diverse audience including EAPN members and partners at national and European levels.
- Invest and organize more EU level events with other organisations, bringing member expertise from the national and EO members, including the European Parliament, Permanent Representations, EESC which are adequately supported and resourced
- Strengthen EAPN's presence in the traditional media which have a strong resonance in Brussels (Le Monde, the Guardian, Politico, etc.) and strengthen EAPNs communications

work – especially as regards reach (for instance on social media, the website, the newsletter, etc.). EAPN’s communication should support, complement and strengthen EAPN’s policy and advocacy work.

- Examine EAPN’s capacity to get involved in public campaigning and building public support. This should include an evaluation of the public campaigning aspect of EMIN 2 and as well an assessment of the capacity of EAPN’s members (financial and human resources, experience and knowledge), and their intentions / motivation to influence public opinion. Before taking any steps in engaging in public campaigning and building public support, there should be as well an open and honest review if it is realistic that EAPN can get involved in public campaigning, taking into account that this is costly, results are difficult to measure and the relation with influencing EU policies is not clear.

- 3. Strengthen the involvement of people experiencing poverty (PeP) and clarify how this can be done in a meaningful way:** All members within EAPN strongly believe in the power and knowledge of people experiencing poverty. There is no doubt that their involvement should be at the heart of our work. As EAPN is a large and diverse network and national networks engage with people experiencing poverty in different ways, it is not an easy task to ensure that people experiencing poverty can participate in our work in a meaningful way. A common understanding of what participation is for EAPN and how it should be organized is necessary to further built the participation of people experiencing poverty within our network.

**We specifically recommend to:**

- Map how national members engage with people experiencing poverty in their work at the national level
- Together with the members, identify what meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty within EAPN is and ensure that we all have a common understanding of it. The empowerment of people experiencing poverty in participating in EU processes should be our first and most important preoccupation. Involving people experiencing poverty in a tokenistic way should be avoided at all cost. In our attempts to improve the participation of people in poverty we should look into our current ways of working without any taboos.
- Recognise and identify what the role of national members is in ensuring the participation of people experiencing poverty at the EU level.
- Build capacity of members to build their policy work on the direct reality of people experiencing poverty, and demonstrate this in their documents/advocacy actions.
- Develop a clear pathway to involve people experiencing poverty more directly in EAPN networks and then in the structures at the EU level. People experiencing poverty participating in the different structures of EAPN should be empowered and receive the support they need from the EAPN-network.
- Strengthen, and potentially revise the Pep-meeting and clarify what its relation is with regard to EU policy work: Bringing together so many people experiencing poverty from all over Europe during 3 days is a unique opportunity and we believe that this opportunity can be further developed. EU policy messages are being developed through the EUISG, on

the basis of the work of the national members and their engagement with people experiencing poverty. We should avoid setting up a parallel process through the PEP-meeting to develop policy messages which risk to not be aligned with the positions developed within the EUISG.

- 4. Rebuilding thrust and transparency:** Currently there is a lot of internal distrust and frustration among the members. This is usually driven by a lack of transparent, clear, and open communication, but also the lack of effective leadership is a problem. There is an urgent need to work on restoring trust between the members and between the different bodies within EAPN, including with and within the office. We need to put the focus back on what unites us and how we can cooperate in a constructive and positive way, the future of our organization is at stake! Many organs within EAPN currently function as separate bodies, each on their own island, also within the EAPN team in Brussels. More links need to be established between all the different entities in order to be able to join forces.

**We put forward the following recommendations:**

- The director of EAPN is fully accountable to the members and the structures representing the members such as the AGA and the ExCo. Decisions taken by the AGA and the ExCo must be strictly followed up by the director. The feeling exists that the strategic review process happened in such a way that positions/views of a substantial part of the members (sometimes a majority) were not taken into account, and that decisions got revisited.
- There is a need to clarify the power of the Bureau. Effective governance requires smaller decision-making structures to have sufficient power, but increased power has to be compensated by full transparency. Therefore we want all meeting documents of the Bureau to be made available to ExCo members as well as detailed minutes of all Bureau meeting (physical and virtual) in a timely manner. There should also be clear information on how proposed actions of the Bureau build on decisions of the AGA and the EXCO.
- We also want the director to be more reactive when members share concerns/frustrations by email or other means – irrespective if these concerns were expressed on a bi-lateral basis or in a larger group.
- The ExCo needs to be kept up to date in enough detail about the financial situation of EAPN at regular moments. The ExCo bears the statutory responsibility for adequate financial management and currently lacks the information to fulfill that role.
- We want ExCo meetings to be better prepared by making all information available sufficiently ahead of the meeting, and by striking the right balance between policy work and statutory issues without duplicating the work of the EUISG
- There should be a regular reporting and exchange between EXCO, EUISG and PEP Coordinators, including at least 1 joint session a year

We are very concerned about the current state of EAPN. To defend the rights of people experiencing poverty in Europe, a strong anti-poverty network, which is neutral, focuses on the right of all and which advocates for structural changes at the EU level is vital. Not only has EAPN lost its strong position in recent years, we believe that without appropriate actions, the future of EAPN will be in danger. We urge the leadership of EAPN, the Bureau and the Director, to accept the situation is urgent. Frustration and anger

among members is growing, and this can potentially even put more pressure on the continuation of EAPN. The recommendations above cannot all be acted upon at once, but we expect the Bureau and the Director to take swift steps in the right direction to rebuild trust and make EAPN again the key European anti-poverty stakeholder it once was.

**As first steps, we recommend to:**

- **Have a detailed discussion within the EXCO on the basis of this resolution to inform any further actions to implement the strategic review.**
- **Ensure that this resolution is used as a guideline within the selection process of the replacement of the Director**
- **Involve a member of the EXCO and the EUISG in the recruitment process of the replacement of the Director to ensure a solid supporting base for the new leadership within the most important bodies of EAPN; Ensure the involvement of a member of the policy team of EAPN, as has always happened in the past.**

Thanks for understanding.

**Signatories**

The Belgian Anti-Poverty Network (BAPN)

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EAPN Norway

EAPN Poland

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