**EUISG WEBINAR: Poverty Watch in the COVID-19 Context**

**Break-out group 2**

**Notes**

**Participants**: EAPN FR, IT, IC, MT, IE, SB, IFSW

**Staff:** Sian

**Feedback on the 2 Questions:**

* **Helena/EAPN France:** The PW was focused on the impact of COVID-19 and government measures. A strong message was that the majority of measures were not reaching/benefiting the poorest people from our discussions with PeP. We calculated only 1%. The main focus in on employment and support companies, but not reaching the people in precarious jobs or those on minimum income. There have been some social measures ie to support the homeless, but they don’t go far enough. EAPN President met the new Social Minister and presented the Poverty Watch, she was very interested. We will use the PW as a basis for our 17 October meeting/campaign.
* **Giulia/EAPN Italy:** We also focused on COVID impact but tried to set it within an overall analysis of the trends in poverty in the short and long-term. The short-term is COVID and government measures to mitigate the negative social and economic impact. People facing poverty flagged up loneliness, isolation, as well as the need for direct and effective economic aid to people facing poverty. Key issues were also problems of paying rents/mortgages with reduced income and rising prices/costs. Long-term: our focus is on dialogue – involving NGOs and People experiencing poverty with the politicians, to propose sustainable solutions. A major focus is adequate income, in terms of employment – young people are particularly at risk. We are disseminating the PW throughout the network, as preparation for 17 October, and will meet/have an event to discuss it, through an on-line meeting.
* **Laufey/EAPN Iceland:** Our Poverty Watch is entirely drafted through interviews with people facing poverty, so very bottom-up. We didn’t focus on COVID, but it’s mainstreamed through the discussions. These were problems before COVID, which have often been exacerbated – for example in the issue of health, there are delays in appointments, people can’t afford health care. Children can’t afford to pay for school lunches and after school activities – everybody pays/gets the same amount regardless of income. When we asked people what they thought of the Government response they said “What response? Was there anything? ‘. On the other more positive side, initiatives have been taken because of Covid ie housing people, or refuges for woman addicts, but now threatened with closure as COVID declines. The women from these new refuges have organized a Press Release and a political campaign to prevent this. It has shown what could work and is possible.
* **Fran/IFSW:** This is their first PW. They sent a questionnaire to all members and got 11 responses, so she pulled out the main common messages, regarding the impact of COVID on their client groups, particularly in relation to access to services, then she illustrated it with examples and comments from different countries. The main message is that they need a strategy to ensure access to universal social services – particular concerns for key vulnerable, and isolated, and at-risk households.
* **Andre/EAPN Malta :** The poverty watch looks at the main groups impacted by poverty, but a key focus is the issue of living minimum income – to ensure a dignified life. COVID has refocussed interest on this issue, and they have been carrying on a campaign. The government will issue a study on Minimum Income now, which is a step forward.
* **Irene/EAPN Ireland**: We focused in the PW on COVID impact – particularly issues were: access to public services – ie a two tier system for health/care in Ireland, income adequacy and decent work, discrimination on the grounds of poverty as a legislative base. They consulted with their policy group which includes people experiencing poverty and service users, so they were involved all the way through. They made their launch/discussion in June already, but it will underpin their October 17 work.
* **Marija/EAPN Serbia:** Our focus is also COVID, but particularly the impact (positive and negative) of government measures or the lack of them. Our assessment highlights that most measures have benefited companies, or the ‘general public’ ie each household received 100 Euros, but children were excluded, also Roma, homeless, those without ID, asylum seekers. There needs to be much clearer targeting to the needs of the vulnerable to ensure they are not left behind. The issue of ‘access to services and benefits’ is crucial, recognising diversity of vulnerability.

**Main Messages from the Group**

**1) Governments’ measures have been more focussed on economic priorities, and not sufficiently on social measures, nor protecting the vulnerable. There is no long-term strategy to fight poverty.**

Key issues include access to universal health/care and social services, inclusive education, situation of precarious workers, inadequate incomes (from benefits and wages), inadequate housing. More priority to be given to vulnerable groups who drop through the net: older people and those with disabilities, children, single parents, people with disabilities homeless, Roma, migrants, undocumented people.

**2) COVID has had some unexpectedly positive impacts: as new services have been trialled ie in housing of homeless/addict, education or focus on income adequacy. This shows what is possible.**

**3) Most members have done Poverty Watches and found them useful, making links to October 17. More sharing/capacity building needs to be done around how to integrate people experiencing poverty in the process – learning from each other.**