**EUISG Webinar Exchange: Tuesday 19 May 10-12 am**

**COMM’ON Guidelines**

**Notes**

***Co-Chairs: Sian Jones / Elke Vandermeerschen / Magda Tancau***

**Draft Agenda**

**Objectives**

* *To present the draft guidelines developed by the COMM’ON Group, the member-led group responsible for the development of the Communication work of EAPN*
* *To stimulate the reflection and discussion on how the guidelines can be implemented at the national level*
* *To reflect on the impact the guidelines can have on the EAPN national and EU/EUISG policy and advocacy work*

**10.00 Welcome/Introduction/objectives of the webinar: *Sian Jones, EAPN Policy Coordinator and Elke Vandermeerschen, EAPN Communications Officer***

***Part 1: Presentation of the guidelines***

* 1. **Presentation of the** [**COMM’ON Guidelines**](https://www.eapn.eu/exco-2020/) ***Elke Vandermeerschen, EAPN Communications Officer and Magda Tancau, EAPN Development Officer***

**10.30 Comment from the EUISG Steering Group: Marija Babovic/EAPN SB**

**10.35 Questions and clarifications**

***Part 2: Discussion and follow-up***

**10.45 Discussion in break-out groups: 3 main questions**

1. *What opportunities do you think the implementation of these guidelines will bring to your policy/advocacy work at national and EU/EUISG level and its impact?*
2. *What challenges do you see around the implementation of the guidelines?*
3. *How do you want to implement this at the national level, working together with your colleagues (ExCo member, National Coordinator, person responsible for comms)?*

**11.25 Feedback from 2 groups and discussion in plenary, conclusions**

**11.50 Conclusions, next steps: Elke Vandermeerschen, *EAPN Communications Officer***

**11.55 Wrapping up, next steps and next webinars: *Sian Jones: EAPN Policy Coordinator***

**Notes from the Meeting**

**Participants**

*National Networks*: Judith Tobac, Belgium; Aleksandra Živković, Croatia; Anna Järvinen, Finland; Jeanne Dietrich, France; Jürgen Schneider, Germany; Laufey Olafsdottir, Iceland; Paul Ginnell, Ireland; Aigars Sveicers, Latvia; Rimgailė Matulionytė, Lithuania; Sonja Leemkuil, Netherlands; Olav Strømmen, Norway; Ryszard Szarfenberg, Poland; Paula Cruz, Portugal; Marija Babović, Serbia; Graciela Malgesini, Spain; Katherine Duffy, United Kingdom

*European Organisation*s: Fran McDonnell, IFSW Europe

*EAPN Staff*: Sian Jones, Sandy Kallenbrum, Rebecca Lee, Mathias Maucher, Magda Tancau, Elke Vandermeerschen

**Introduction**

**Sian** welcomed the participants, introduced the topic of the meeting and highlighted the objectives of the webinar. She highlighted the importance of good coordination between the policy and communication and dissemination work - done in different formats for different target groups. For EAPN Europe work this focuses primarily on the European institutions, policy makers and partner organisations. She informed the participants that the COMM’ON Guidelines have been presented at an ExCO meeting on 31 March. Based on feedback and input received from the EUISG and PeP Coordinators and adapted accordingly they should be adopted at an ExCO meeting in June. This explains the importance for the EUISG delegates to contribute to the debate, as this also is in line with the usual procedures in EAPN and as the COMM’ON Guidelines would also have an impact on the future policy work, the deliverables produced and the main formats and targets group for the communication and dissemination work of both the national networks and EAPN Europe. She referred to the questions to structure the exchange in the two break-out rooms. All participants are invited to share their feedback on the opportunities and challenges with the use of the COMM’ON Guidelines.

**Presentation of** [**COMM’ON Guidelines**](https://www.eapn.eu/exco-2020/) **& questions and clarifications**

**Elke** and **Magda** [presented the COMM’ON Guidelines](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EAPN-COMMON-guidelines-powerpoint-May2020-4473.pptx). They explained the tasks of the COMM’ON Group, the objectives of the COMM’ON Guidelines and the structure of their presentation. After a general introduction given by Elke, Magda presented sections 01 and 02, Elke took over with sections 03, 04 and 05 (for which due to time constraints not all slides could be talked through).

As member of the EUISG Steering Group, **Marija** shared her personal reflections on selected aspects of the COMM’ON Guidelines and some points raised by Elke and Magda in her presentation. She considers the efforts to improve the communication of EAPN and of EAPN members as crucial and the welcomed the elaboration of the documents, including with some templates and Inspirational Boxes.

Marija identified some problems which lie outside the COMM’ON Guidelines. Work on them started before the Strategic Review Process was concluded in September 2019 in Helsinki, underlining that communication work should be designed once the general and the policy strategy of EAPN is in place. In this sense, the COMM’ON Guidelines will not help to overcome structural gaps in EAPN where for most national networks the policy work is their core activity (as this is also shown in graphs proposed for inclusion into for the Strategic Review document). First policy and PeP work would need to be better integrated. This, however, is not yet done systematically and structurally in many national networks. Communication work should then build on the outcomes and outputs of this joint effort, not be designed and developed detached from this. Marija wondered about the mandate of the COMM’ON Group and why the focus of the COMM’ON Guidelines is not equally on policy work (where a lot of support is needed) and only on PeP work/participation. The COMM’ON Guidelines also speak about the “integration of policy officers”, but first it is not clear how this should be done. And second and more importantly, would it make sense to start with the communication work or should it not rather build on the policy activities and be adapted to the related needs of the national networks to support their policy and advocacy work?

Whereas Marija welcomed the details of the COMM’ON Guidelines, she questioned their immediate usefulness. Two major challenges are that the COMM’ON Guidelines still contain inconsistences and are not sufficiently coherent (as mentioned above) and that they fail to provide orientation for EAPN at a more strategic level as they were elaborated prior to the final decision on the integration of different parts, groups, etc. of EAPN, with the role of the policy work and the related communication and dissemination needs not being adequately reflected.

Marija also touched on the issue who is identified and seen as PeP, only those currently affected by poverty and social exclusion or also those having been in this situation in earlier phases of their life? She remarked that she was in this situation, as were many notable members of the EUISG.

**Sian** invited other colleagues to ask questions and make comments before going into the break-out rooms.

* **Sonja/EAPN NL** welcomed the clarity of the guidelines and recalled the need, being herself a PeP and having a lot of experience of local policy and decision making. However, she also said that care should be taken with representing PeP in European/transnational EAPN contexts, so as not to overburden PeP with too many roles and expectations. PeP also have to know the role of the policy work and of policy papers. The language used in the paper should be more positive and set out the future “integrated vision”.
* **Aleksandra/EAPN HR** highlighted that communication is a tool for what is being developed by the policy group and work and recalled that detailed guidelines are difficult to be used by small and non-well-staffed networks.
* **Katherine/EAPN UK** mentioned that in the COMM’ON Guidelines PeP are seen too much as undifferentiated mass whereas adequate communication and dissemination work and priorities also depend on from which group (e.g. children, persons with disabilities, elderly) and/or from which minority of the population a PeP is. She also flagged up the inconsistent use of the concepts “participation” (as “voice” and the right to influence, using the collective experience and voice) and “representation” (as the right to decide, with every citizen have one vote) in the COMM’ON Guidelines and wondered where PeP are in these structures, also in relation to leadership in (EAPN) organisations. Katherine finally referred to the costs of participation of PeP and their involvement, comprising the costs to realise meaningful participation on the one hand and the time spent by PeP when engaging and the “changeover possibility” for PeP into paid employment with NGOs – are an experience of poverty and social exclusion and authenticity then selection criteria? As Marija had said, she also strongly called for broadening the “concept” of PeP (in the document and in EAPN’s Communication work) to include those with earlier phases of experience as Katherine herself.

**Feedback from 2 groups and discussion in plenary**

**Judith** reported back from [**break-out session 1**](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EAPN-COMMON_Guidelines_Break-out_Room_1-4469.docx) (additional points were raised by other participants):

* **Looking at the opportunities**, the COMM’ON Guidelines will help us to be more attentive to and to more often use plain language in order to make the outcomes of the work more accessible. Nevertheless, more technical and analytical documents are also needed to underpin the policy and advocacy work, the communication and dissemination work thus needs to be differentiated by target groups. They were also seen as a tool to develop more real participation and communication and as an impulse to improve EAPN’s communication and participation work. The group also discussed which “incentives” for engagement are appropriate for PeP (coverage of costs of transport, food, etc., but also direct pay?) and which employment opportunities in our organisations can be offered to them. The guidelines were also seen as “springboard” to better link and coordinate the work within the national networks of EUISG delegates and PeP coordinators and to organise joint meetings at European level. They also help to see participation as something much broader that only bringing in quotes based on personal experiences into the communication work as PeP also have a range of qualifications and knowledge that can be regularly used also e.g. in the policy work.
* **When it comes to the challenges**, participants mentioned the considerable costs to make meaningful participation happen, the different structures and resources of national network as EAPN combines organisations working **with, for and by PeP**. EAPN has currently been committed to the 1st two. If it is to become by PeP this will mean a completely different organization, which has not been fully discussed. It is also to be recalled that some networks currently have no PeP structure (anymore). If progress on participation is to be achieved these differences need to be mapped and addressed. Another challenge is the different roles of PeP, they can be volunteers, they can be staff of grass-root organisations – and then have to be paid. The COMM’ON Guidelines would need to include more on the policy pillar of EAPN (which is largely missing) and be inspirational to guide a strategy of well-connecting policy work and participation work with people experiencing poverty.

**Ryszard** reported back from [**break-out session** **2**](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EAPN-COMMON_Guidelines_Break-out_Room_2-4470.docx) (additional points were raised by other participants):

* Looking at the **opportunities**, those networks with wide-reaching experiences, structures for PeP and resources, including paid staff, can better achieve this aim, whereas other national networks are struggling to have money, projects, staff. The participants also mentioned the importance of using – in selected documents – plain language.
* **Challenges:** This implies a need for flexibility in the implementation of the COMM’ON Guidelines which is one challenge and make a step-by-step approach necessary. The Lithuanian examples shows that smaller networks need to make a decision on how they can get impact on policy at the national level and be taken seriously, in some cases (LT, PL for example) this has means that they opt for presenting themselves as a network of experts on social policy, poverty, etc., and not a network of activists or social movements. This means that they can only partially or step-by-step use the proposals and recommendations of the COMM’ON Guidelines, or at least give more prominence to their policy role. National networks also have to assess if they consider more adequate to involve PeP in campaign work and/or in policy work and/or in the communication activities rather than all of them?. Another challenge is to combine the detailed policy work of a national network, e.g. on the European Semester, and the preparation of PeP meetings. Participants also mentioned the challenge of expectation management when PeP are involved in the communication work, e.g. sharing stories and own experiences. Most of them want to get out of poverty, and want to know what benefit this kind of work will bring them..

**Sian** took up some of the points. She wondered what the COMM’ON Guidelines concretely imply for EAPN’s policy work and the work of the EUISG , clarifying who the main publications we are aiming at. In the EUISG members view it appears that they see these audiences as mainly decision-makers at national and EU level and other stakeholders. She also referred to the differentiation of the communication and dissemination work by target audience which clearly is understood and shared, but what this concretely implies then for communication, how it is organised, focused, which channels is uses, etc. is not spelled out in the” COMM’ON Guidelines.

**Graciela** recalled the gender bias of participation as women face particular obstacles to participate and if they are also single parents, they face cumulative obstacles. As Marija and Katherine earlier, she highlighted that another challenge is the identification of PeP, because people move in and out of poverty and poor people or migrants don’t want to be seen or classified as “poor” – this challenges needs to be addressed. People who have experienced poverty in an earlier phase of their life , for communication purposes, should be considered, too. Another shortcoming of the PeP concept is that it does not necessarily grasp well other vulnerabilities (e.g. victims of gender-based violence, persons with disabilities) besides being poor. She suggested to still include in the COMM’ON Guidelines – as one aspect to use participation also for communication purposes – the methodology of participatory action research which considers the voices and testimonies of people through qualitative research. It was e.g. used by EAPN ES for their report for a Parliament hearing on minimum income and female single parents. It was also the basis for an EAPN participative research tool Kit developed in the DRIVERS project on social determinants of health inequalities, involving national members.

**Conclusions, next steps**

Reacting to the feedback provided by the EUISG delegates and the questions raised during the webinar, **Elke** clarified that the COMM’ON Guidelines have been elaborated by the COMM’ON Group involving a number of EAPN members and also including to 50% PeP. The COMM’ON Guidelines cannot cover all links to the policy work. Elke suggested the EUISG might develop similar guidelines. Elke also highlighted that the work on the COMM’ON Guidelines was based on the Dutch Resolution She also clarified that the mandate of the COMM’ON Group comes from the ExCo. The approach in the COMM’ON Guidelines is that plain language means clear, precise and elegant language. The COMM’ON Group plans to suggest trainings on plain language. Elke informed that based on the feedback from the other groups (ExCo, PeP Coordinators, EUISG) the COMM’ON Group would organise a meeting to revise and finalise them. She finally highlighted that once the COMM’ON Guidelines would be adopted by the ExCo they would not be optional, but should be used as working document, with the implementation depending on what is useful and feasible for the national networks. Some “light guidance” will be developed soon.

**Wrapping up, next steps and next webinars**

**Sian** thanked everybody for the active participation and informed the participants that notes of the meetings will be drafted by the Policy Team and circulated, also to the COMM’ON Group and the ExCo. She stressed that the discussions are part of a process (also in the light of the Belgian Resolution currently being discussed and recalling the key importance of EAPN’s policy work) that has now started and that several participants have highlighted that the COMM’ON Guidelines deal a lot with communication and participation, but – whereas being implied – does not directly address the issues of policy and advocacy (e.g. when the aim is to communicate complicated issues to policy makers).

She reminded everybody to fill in the questionnaire for the EAPN COVID study and to send it by 25 May to Graciela.

Sian announced that the **EUISG Webinar on Poverty Watches and the Green Deal** is planned on **2 June, 10-12**. The final timing and programme will be confirmed soon. The EUISG Webinar afterwards to cover part of the activities foreseen for the EUISG meeting end of June would take place on **25 June**.

**Annex:** [**Key messages from the chatbox**](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EAPN-Messages-Chat-4472.docx)

Topics exchanged about via the chat function were the challenges to identify PeP, to reach out to them and to keep engaged in a mutually rewarding and fair manner what to understand by and when to use “plain language”, which roles PeP can have in view of communication, testimonies, policy, and campaigns. The main arguments exchanged there are also reflected in these notes.

**Summary of Key Messages from EUISG WEBINAR – COMM’ON Guidelines**

**Agreed by the Steering Group 03.06.2020**

* **General appreciation of the Guidelines** and attractive presentation. They are useful for giving ideas for better involving people in poverty in the networks and in the communication work. Most members would welcome more opportunities to discuss and build capacity, together with EXCO and PeP Coordinators.
* **However, members felt that the link to policy work (National and EU level/EUISG) was generally missing**: i.e. how to involve people in poverty in policy work and the link between communication and effective policy/advocacy work. This whole area is invisible and undeveloped so far in the Guidelines. EUISG members highlighted that most of their policy work was targeted at decision-makers at EU and national level and relevant stakeholders, and therefore needed to be detailed and geared to policy makers, supported by effective communication work – this is not discussed at any point in the guidelines.
* **The members underlined achieving real policy impact needs both evidence from the ground from people experiencing poverty (i.e. qualitative) and quantitative data and concrete examples. BOTH** are essential for effective advocacy. This is the basis agreed for the Poverty Watches by the EUISG member. At the moment we seem to be running the risk of focussing only on the 1st, which could undermine our effectiveness.
* **Some other key challenges to implementing the Guidelines were**:
* **Lack of resources**: funding, personnel and time - many smaller networks do not have paid workers, and if they do – they combine functions ie policy and communication and/or participation work. It takes time and expertise to embed participative methodologies within networks that rely on volunteers.
* **networks often gain their added value/funding from policy expertise:**  networks highlighted that they gained their profile, support and funding from expert analysis, so although it would be good to improve the connection with people experiencing poverty, they would not be able to jeopardise this role. This also influences the funding (ie through projects/etc).
* **Concern that oversimplistic materials would undermine policy impact: t**his will depend on being clear who the target audience is in the communication work. If it’s policy makers you have to adapt the style to what is useful and can have policy impact – detail is important!
* **Supporting people experiencing poverty means listening to what they want: valuing not patronising them, compensating and not overburdening them –** most people are looking for a way out of poverty, so networks mustn’t ‘use’ them but listen to their needs, ensure that they are valued & compensated with payment of expenses and for their time (?). We should avoid being patronising (ie assuming they can’t use phone/technology) but also not overburden them ie they should not be expected/forced to get involved in everything if they don’t want to - for example detailed policy work.
* **There is a lack of clarity in the Guidelines and the Strategic Review about whether the aim is to transform EAPN into a network working WITH and FOR people experiencing poverty (in our existing mission) or BY them -** ie completely self-organized by people experiencing poverty. If the latter, this is a major transformation of the network and has huge implications which most networks have not fully understood.

**Specific Proposals on the Guidelines related to the policy work/EUISG**

The Guidelines should include a section on the link between participation, communication and policy work in order to confirm the Strategic Review 3 pillars. At the moment the Comm’on Guidelines is only focussed on participation and communication.

* **Concretely they should give concrete guidance on how people experiencing poverty should be involved in the policy work**, at national and EU level – including the detailed work.
* **For the communication work clarify how concretely it will support the policy work** aimed at influencing decision and policy makers, recognizing the need to tailor documents and our communication to different target audiences rather than all aimed at the “general public”
* **A joint meeting/working group** could be established involving representatives of the Comm’on Group/PeP Coordinators and EUISG to help adapt/complete the guidelines with the connection to policy work.