

**Notes of EAPN General Assembly**

**17 June 2021
Online**

# Session 1 – WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

**Recognising members:** **The president thanked members who were stepping down from various bodies in EAPN, recognising the important contributions made**. He mentioned **Vilborg Oddsdottir**, EAPN Iceland, **Marjatta Kaurala** from EAPN Finland and **Richard Delplanque** (EAPN France).

**Ratifying Delegates:**

1. **EAPN Iceland**

Magnea Sverrisdottir is nominated to replace Vilborg Oddsdottir.

1. **EAPN Austria**

Leena Erasaari is nominated to replace Marjatta Karaula

**Nominate proxies:**

Jo Bothmer (NL) gives proxy to Mathias Becker (DE)

**Decision**

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| **D1. New delegates were ratified. 96 yes, 0 no, 0 abstentions** |

# Session 2 – 2020 Reports

**Key discussion points**

Hélder presented EAPN activity report 2020 referring that in terms of policy and politics, there was a significant number of deliverables carried out throughout 2020 and that EAPN reacted fast in addressing the impact of COVID.

Philippe presented the financial reports 2020: Global budget 2020 (GA5) and Explanation of 2019 loss (GA7c); Balance Sheet 2020 (GA6) and Recommendations on Allocations to EAPN Reserves (GA7b); Auditor’s report 2020 (GA7) and Explanatory note (GA7a) and, finally, the Rules of evaluation (GA7d).

Carlos referred the need to proceed with the approval of minutes of the 2020 General Assembly.

Freek questioned why EAPN had such a big underspend in 2020 and why the available money was not spent. He believes they should have reinforced the policy team since the European Commission gave maximum flexibility to reallocate the money.

Regarding PeP meetings, Eleni questioned if they have to return the stipulated money for coffees, lunches, and meals.

Guy asked about the possibility of having funding for an event that EAPN France intends to hold during the first half of 2022. They would like to create an event allusive to the French presidency. He also referred that he is under the impression that they have not received the conventions to be signed with the EAPN for the annual convention.

Hélder, regarding underspend, indicates the need to go through a process of approving the allocation of these funds with the EC. He believes the safest way for EAPN not to incur in allocating the funds in a way that may later not be accepted by the European Commission is to ask for their authorization.

Philippe declared that in 2020 ExCo decided to save some money in case face-to-face meetings could take place and that is the biggest reason for the underspend. In his opinion, there was no need to reinforce the policy team in 2020. Answering to Eleni, Philippe stated that the money is coming from EAPN fund and therefore it should not be reimbursed. Regarding the contracts 2021, the only aspect left to resolve is the progress report, more information is needed to ensure that all networks know what they are engaging in when they sign the contract. Responding to Guy, regarding EAPN France event, he stated that it is a decision that will always be taken to the ExCo to ensure that the decision to reallocate money is being made by all ExCo with recommendations from staff and bureau, considering the best interest of the network.

Freek expressed that he was not satisfied with the answer. Since they had maximum flexibility from the EC to allocate and reallocate funds, he does not believe there was any reason to be overly prudent. Some of the members considered EAPN was experiencing a staff crisis and should have invested more in policy. He also does not believe that saving that amount of money to possibly have physical meetings was a valid argument. For him, it was a waste of money to return 10% to the EC, the money could have been spent on translation or equipment. He believes that proper financial management has not been done.

Philippe expressed that if in September/October is understood that there is an underspend, there is not much staff to hire. For him, there was no crisis at that moment, it was just a normal situation where two members of staff were being replaced. There was a lot of flexibility allowed, but they would be required to explain on a case-by-case basis when reallocating the money.

Carlos declared that it is easier to find solutions after the processes are over. ExCo decided by a large majority to save money to hold a face-to-face meeting and when the strengthening of the policy team was discussed, the team itself expressed it was not productive to hire someone for the last months. Considering the circumstances of the year 2020, he believes the management was reasonably effective.

Marija pointed out that for many other members of EAPN what they are facing now is the consequence of several years of attempts of strategic planning and restructuring that weakened the policy components of the organization. In her opinion, it is crucial to be aware that this is the consequence of some of their processes and decisions in order to not repeat the same mistakes and strengthen the network.

Carlos reinforced that the fact that they must strengthen the policy team has already been discussed and that it is being dealt with.

Maria agreed with Marija and stated that they have to find time to seriously discuss these structural problems and find clear decisions about them.

Hélder emphasized that is important to acknowledge that in 2020, given the difficulties, EAPN was able to produce a significant amount of work. He also underlined “Now it is time to consider how did we achieve to produce that work? How can we improve the structures and how can we do it in a more sustainable way for the future?”

Carlos indicated that it is necessary to proceed to the vote and thanked Rebeca for all her commitment in this matter.

**Decision**

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| **D2. Minutes of the 2020 General Assembly (GA3) were ratified.** **90 in favour, 0 against, 6 abstentions.** |
| **D3. The EAPN 2020 activity report (GA4) was ratified. 93 in favour, 0 against, 3 abstentions** |
| **D4. The recommendation from GA6b was ratified. 74 in favour, 0 against, 22 abstentions** |
| **D5. The 2020 Balance Sheet (GA6) was ratified. 78 in favour, 0 against, 18 abstentions** |
| **D6. The full auditors’ report (GA7) was ratified. 87 in favour, 0 against, 9 abstentions** |
| **D7. The auditors’ report for EC EASI 2020 (GA7b) was ratified.** **88 in favour, 0 against, 8 abstentions** |
| **D8. The Rules of evaluation (GA7d) were ratified.** **80 in favour, 0 against, 16 abstentions** |
| **D9. The ‘Discharge of the Members’ was accepted.** **82 in favour, 0 against, 14 abstentions** |

# Session 3 – FRAMEWORK PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (FPA) AND WORK PROGRAMME 2022 (WP 2022)

**Key discussion points**

Decision to be made: give mandate to the ExCo to work on the FPA proposal

Helder presented the information we gathered so far on the new FPA application process. The call is nearly finalised and should be published around 23 of June, with the deadline for the application to be sent in 28 of September. The issue of the timeline for developing the application was highlighted. We will work together on it and we have to organise ourselves over the summer period to develop the application. We would like all the working groups of EAPN and the governance bodies to participate in this process. We have been discussing about the possibility of an extraordinary GA but most likely will be after the deadline for submission. Therefore, we ask the GA to give a mandate to the ExCo to collectively approve the application to submit it on time to the EC.

Carlos: any comments or questions?

There were no comments or questions from the members on the proposal.

Eleni, EAPN Cyprus: because this is a mandate that the GA gives to ExCo I would like to have a formal vote on it.

**Decision**

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| **D10. Do you accept the mandate to the ExCo to approve the Framework Partnership agreement/Work Programme 2022 application?**  **88 in favour, 0 against, 8 abstentions.** |

# Session 4 – POLICY PRIORITIES AND IMPACT

**Key discussion points**

We explored how the work of EAPN work perceived by funders. We received a very positive feedback, as the work on MI, Poverty Watches and the European Semester is valued. We live in a changing context: green and digital transitions, EPSR Action Plan, Child Guarantee and the new architecture of the European Semester based on Resilience and Recovery plans. Our challenge will be how to integrate these multi-dimensional issues in our work on poverty and social exclusion.

Eleni Karaoli: after 3 or 4 years in the Exco, we have a lot of reports and research, but we do not make use of these efficiently as these are not visible and accessible. She believes that we need to capacity of our members and their members by giving them the resources to deliver and push at national level. The only question we should ask is if we are ready to discuss structural changes.

Kart Mere: she thinks that we have lost 2 years in discussions. In her opinion, we cannot become a network/movement.

Sandra Araujo: it is important to monitor the framework of the structural funds 2030 because, in several countries, there will be assessment of applications to fight poverty and social exclusion; civil society needs to be engaged in this process.

Ian Johnston: he supports the request for clarity by Eleni and the modernisation of the statute in line with legal requirements in Belgium.

Biljana Dukovska: discussions on energy transition have started everywhere; she would like EAPN to have a position on the adaptation to climate change in the context of human rights. The question we should ask is “what implications do Green Deal and Just Transition have for real people and life?”. The impact of climate on human rights should be further explored. Cross-cutting issues need to be considered more closely, such as climate and healthcare. So far we concentrated our efforts on energy poverty exclusively.

Guy Janvier: EAPN France would like to make the most of the French Presidency in 2022. They would like to organise an event with partner organisations of EAPN France and the discuss the right to high-quality sustainable food. France is an agricultural country, but people are poor. There are many inequalities between producers, processes and distribution, so the question “how is food produced?” is relevant.

Paul Ginnell: our capacity is very limited and we need to choose the focus. Digital transition is important but is unlikely to be inclusive. We need to keep our focus on the integrated approach when we assess opportunities linked to the EPSR. There is a poverty reduction paragraph in the action plan. There is also a mention of Commission/Civil Society dialogue which leaves the floor open to suggestions and proposals: we can consider these opportunities.

Luigi Leonori: health and mental health are important priorities for people living in poverty and precarity. We need to focus on the interconnection between health and extreme poverty. Food security is also a priority because people are exploited in agriculture and receive low salaries.

Freek Spinnewijn: we need objective selection criteria to decide on priorities: (1) real policy impact at EU & national level (2) link with European Commission priorities particularly DG EMPL (3) relevant for the fight against poverty and for at least the large majority of EAPN members (4) availability to and easy access of expertise in EAPN network (5) link with EU funding/financing priorities so that there is potential financial benefits for EAPN members (6) added value of EAPN work where our voice and contribution can be unique: we should find 'niche' issues (7) clarity and relevance about potential asks where we have consensus

Helder’s conclusion: this exchange provided an initial opportunity to start thinking about our priorities in view of the next FPA. He called on each member organisation to work together as a team to provide any relevant input for the next FPA.

# Session 5 – MEMBERSHIP EXCHANGE

**Key discussion points:**

Eleni introduces the session on Membership Exchange as an opportunity for members to share their biggest success and most important challenge for their network in this period. And then invites members to take the floor.

Ian: would like to stress that social workers have suffered greatly during the pandemic to be able to offer their services. Greatest need is for more preventative services, which are the consequences of lack of social pillar. All problems they have to deal with are huge and problems of every type and nature have increased. Face to face contact is needed and has not taken place, which is why we really need to talk about social services.

Anna: would like to mention that Slovakia has a new government, this was initiated due to a journalist being killed by the Slovak mafia, lots of high officials are in prison, and poverty cannot be removed if the govenrment is not against poverty. For the moment cooperation does not take place with the new government. Their network will prepare a Slovak EMIN II, the bus will travel through Slovakia and should support the new government to fight against poverty.

Sandra: would like to share relevant activities, there has been a meeting with social ministry, and a research has been organised on the impact of covid on social economy. In March an event was organised around the social pillar, as well as regional commissions that will be responsible for the management of funds. There are lots of documents in preparation, and social organisations are trying to make some recommendations in order to influence the new programmes. There are also two new projects on migration, to which african countries are also participating. The work has been going on with the high commissioner for migration in Portugal. Two universities in Portugal are doing research, trying to get funding through contacts with the health minister.

Paul: It has become very clear that we have reached an extreme form of poverty. Lots of families are not able to afford the basic necessities and have become totally dependent on foodbanks. This was already the case before the crisis and has now become worse. There has been coordination around a group which has issued a briefing notably on adequate income and also housing. Extreme poverty is continually increasing, and foodbanks are becoming a normalised way of coping.

Luigi: would really like to stress again that health issues go hand in hand with all the other problems. Ill people usually suffer also at a psychological level, middle class people encounter problems now they did not have before. Today there are only 3 EOs present at the GA, it is important to have a different focus on healthcare and housing, we are in a situation of emergency. We need European projects on shelters, places that enable people to live and relieve their suffering. People are queuing for charity and free meals and it is getting worse and worse. Once the lockdown is over people will not go back to their homes. If we do not know how to invest why not back up some EOs just like ours? EAPN used to support SMES maybe there is an opening for some possibilities here ?

Freek : asks if we can we agree at this GA that we can put aside/ignore the strategy that was developed under the leadership of Leo over 2 years and that was endorsed by GA when we draft the next 4-year partnership application for DG EMPL? In the current policy context at EU level the strategy is nothing else than a straight jacket which prevents us from seizing the political opportunity. It might be a procedural issue but as the GA approved it formally, we might want to 'disapprove' it in some way. If not, anybody can argue over the summer months that we have to stick to the letter of the strategy and he/she would be right This is just as a precaution. What we need is a very flexible vision of the strategy, this could really influence our funding, and we have absolutely no guarantee that we get the funding.

Carlos: we need to be flexible and react to realities, and have to take liberties with the programme. Next GA is planned for November, changes will be ratified at that point. It would be really weird to do this at this point, we need to be smart and consider our realities. We need to be flexible. The limits we have before us are the limits we set for ourselves. We cannot define this at this very moment.

Kärt: would like to have a concrete date for when the contracts will be sent out. And also to share the need to know when Brussels team takes its holidays and will not be available. Need to know when Philippe can make the payments.

Eleni: a calendar should be sent out to members with dates when the contracts will go out, when they are sent back, and with a specific timeline.

Helder: the idea brought to this GA is to start thinking about the FPA process, and all members are encouraged to anticipate. He requets all members to work together as a team in the various networks, so that all these aspects can be picked up and integrated into the FPA.

# Session 6 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

**Key discussion points:**

Carlos thanks everyone for the interesting debate, some things got lost in the discussion but this is always difficult. He then reads out the results of the votes which are detailed in the table under session 2.

AOB: there are some issues concerning the bureau, Vera has had to leave for health reasons and has not been replaced because of gender balance. Richard has also left for professional reasons. There has been no formal process of elections as there are only 4 months left. Until then the Bureau will stay as it is with 5 members and Carlos will be in charge of treasury for the time being. He asks if there are any objections to this and the answer is no (no objections).

Again Carlos thanks all the delegates, he says that we will work very hard in order to face all the challenges, and we will rely on our strength and willpower. We have to build upon our priorities, look towards the future, at all the contributions and opportunities; there is so much capacity in our networks, in the National teams, in the staff and all our members.

We all want the best FPA, to strengthen EAPN but also its member organisations.