

# **Policy and Advocacy**

## **Mapping Report**



### **Executive Summary**

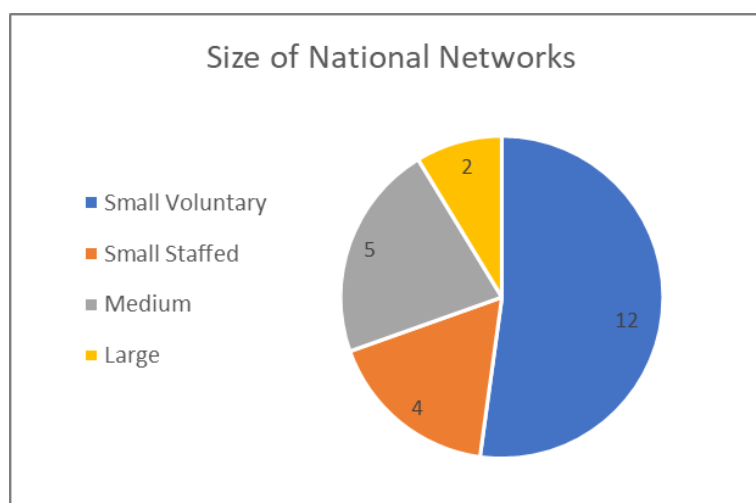
This report documents qualitative research that was carried out with national anti-poverty networks who are members of the European Anti-Poverty Network. It examines the overall capacity of networks to engage in policy and advocacy work, the policy priorities of members at a national level and the advocacy tactics used to achieve change. The purpose of this inquiry is to gain an understanding of how the policy work of EAPN Europe can be better tailored to the needs of the members. Between March and April 2022, online interviews were carried out with 18 EAPN national networks by Participation and Development Officer Magda Tancau and intern Krystal Brogaard. In April 2023, an additional 5 interviews were conducted by Magda Tancau and intern Aoife Burke. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings show a large variation between the 23 networks interviewed, both in terms of their overall capacity and the scale of their policy and advocacy work. Multiple networks have core funding and permanent paid staff, which enables them to produce substantial policy outputs independent of the work led by the secretariat. Moreover, several of these networks reported consistent advocacy efforts which at times yielded concrete results such as legislative change. However, a substantial majority of networks are operating on a fully or mostly voluntary basis and have extremely limited capacity. In most cases, the Poverty Watch is the main policy output for these networks, with some also engaging in small scale activities such as policy events or social media campaigns. Overall, a lack of resources means the vast majority of networks are not able to engage in policy and advocacy work to the level they see as necessary.

Based on the findings of the research, this report is structured as follows. Section One looks at the capacity of national members, focusing in particular on funding and human resources. Section Two investigates the policy work of the networks, including policy strategy, priorities and deliverables, as well as engagement with the policy work of EAPN Europe. Section Three focuses on advocacy, including the advocacy tactics used, the relationship between national networks and their government and the achievements of advocacy work. Lastly, Section Four outlines recommendations for how EAPN Europe can better support the policy and advocacy work of members.

### **1. Capacity**

The capacity of EAPN national members in terms of both funding and human resources varies dramatically. With respect to this, the membership can be divided into four categories; fully voluntary networks, small networks with the support of some paid staff hours, medium sized networks with their own secretariate and networks with high budgets and a large workforce. The pie chart below illustrates the breakdown of the 23 national networks that were interviewed in terms of size category.



#### *Voluntary Networks:*

Most EAPN networks interviewed receive no core funding and are run on a purely voluntary basis. These include EAPN Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden. Representatives from these networks highlighted different reasons that they were unable to secure core funding. For instance, in Hungary, the hostile environment for NGOs means that state funding is not an option and they are reliant on private donations and funds from abroad. Similarly, the Slovakian network shared that very few NGOs receive any kind of state funding in their country. Moreover, the networks in Cyprus, Poland and Slovenia are all ineligible for core funding as they are not registered as a legal entity.

For most of the voluntary networks, including Cyprus, Italy, Slovenia, Slovakia and Estonia, their only source of funding is the small amount they receive from their contract with EAPN Europe. The Italian Network highlighted that while they are interested in working on issues such as the European Semester and the Recovery and Resilience Funds, they do not yet have the resources to complete such work. The completion of the Poverty Watch and their work on participation takes up most of their time. In contrast, the Estonian Network shared that although they do not have funding for the network itself, their members are quite large and so they are able to carry out some activities and events with their support. Nevertheless, the colleagues from EAPN Estonia stressed that the pandemic severely impacted their work and they have still not recovered.

Several of the networks without core funding or staff were able to secure some level of project-based funding. These include Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, and Sweden. EAPN Sweden receives about €1,000 every year from membership fees as well as some small project-based funding from their members. However, the Swedish colleagues stressed that their main source of funding is their contract with EAPN Europe. Similarly, the Croatian network received funding from EAPN Austria for the Journalism Prize, as well as some symbolic amounts for project-based work with other partners. Again, they are mostly reliant on funding from the secretariat. EAPN North Macedonia receive funding from EAPN Europe, the Journalism Prize Money and from Horizon

2020 for their project on energy poverty. Together these funds total €7,300 per year. They highlighted that applying for more project-based funding in itself requires human resources that they do not have.

Though networks in this category have access to additional funds, operating on a voluntary basis still greatly limits their ability to engage in policy and advocacy work. For instance, representatives from EAPN Netherlands, who have access to some local project-based funds, highlighted that while the network is very motivated to produce policy papers on various topics, this is difficult to achieve without sufficient human resources. Similarly, EAPN Poland receive state funding for projects, but highlighted that to improve the impact of their policy work they would have to engage in more lobbying, which they do not have the capacity to do.

Some of the voluntary national networks shared that they engaged in fundraising attempts to mitigate the lack of funding. For instance, EAPN Slovakia have produced and sold a book in collaboration with one of their member organizations and EAPN Hungary shared that they rely on donations and have had some very successful crowdfunding campaigns.

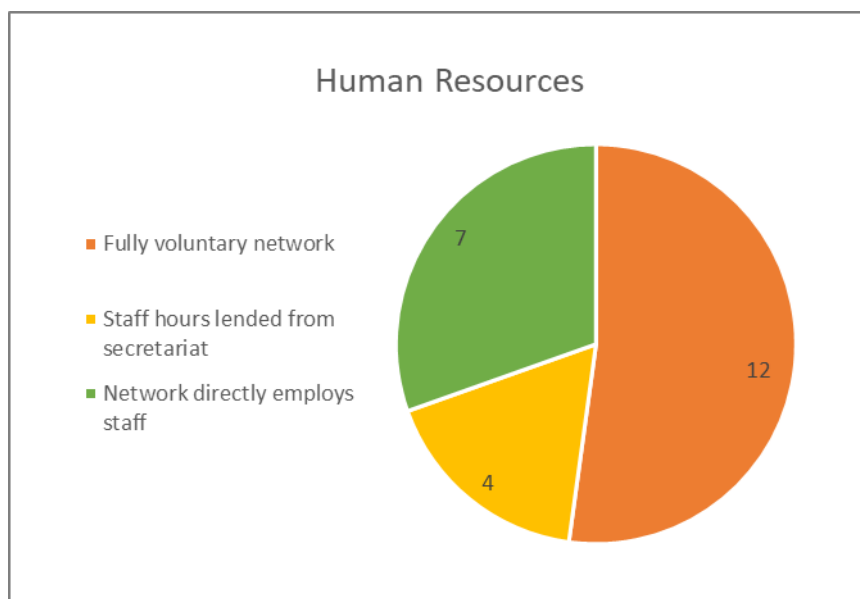
#### *Small Staffed Networks:*

Several national networks are hosted by one of their member organisations, who lend some staff hours and infrastructure to the network. Having this support increases the sustainability and capacity of networks compared to those run on a purely voluntary basis, though they nonetheless have limited resources. These networks include Finland, Norway, Germany and Greece.

EAPN Finland is hosted by SOSTE, who provide meeting spaces and infrastructure to the network. Erja, an employee of SOSTE, dedicates 40% of her hours to EAPN. Between membership fees and the funding from EAPN Europe, the Finnish network receives €11,000 per year, not including the portion of Erja's salary provided by SOSTE. Although EAPN Finland does have the support of a staff member, they nonetheless have very limited capacity. They do not have any core funding, nor do they have the resources to apply for it. However, they do sometimes receive small amounts for projects carried out in collaboration with members. The colleagues shared that action groups focusing on specific issues such as homelessness or human rights find it easier to secure funding than networks such as EAPN.

At EAPN Norway, the secretariat is hosted by the Welfare Alliance, which is one of their members. This organisation has three permanent staff members and all of them work on tasks related to EAPN. They do not have any one person dedicated to policy and they try to keep everyone up to date on activities related to the network. That said, some staff dedicate more hours to this work than others. The secretariat receives the equivalent of approximately €240,000 in core funding per year from the Department of the Welfare Directorate. They are trying to diversify their sources of funding through project-based work, however these funds vary significantly year on year. For example, in 2022, they received €8,500 in project-based funding, but they have not secured any project-based funding for 2023.

Some networks ordinarily have the support of paid staff, but in practice their human resources are comparable to that of voluntary networks. For example, EAPN Germany is hosted by a member organisation, which provides funding and the contribution of staff hours to the network. However, unlike other national networks, the host organisation rotates among members every two years. The network is currently in a period of transition because when the last two-year increment ended, no new organisation took over as the secretariat. Though they receive a small amount of funding from the German Ministry of Labour for the PeP meeting, the absence of a secretariat has greatly disrupted the work. EAPN Greece also has very limited resources. They have a part-time communications officer from one of their member organisations, however, the coordination of the network is done by the board on an entirely voluntary basis. They receive funding via two European projects they are partners in, but they are mostly dependent on the contract with EAPN Europe and do not have the capacity to engage in policy and advocacy activities independent from the work of the secretariat.



#### *Medium sized networks:*

Though the networks discussed above have some support from paid staff they do not have their own employees per se and tend to have a limited capacity. In contrast, networks such as Belgium, Ireland, Austria and Lithuania, have their own secretariat and thus benefit from greater sustainability.

For example, APN Ireland has an office with three paid staff, all of which are part time. One works on policy, one on policy and communication and one on finance and administration. Their biggest source of funding is the grant they receive from the state, which they must reapply for every three years. In the previous round of funding they received €90,000 per annum, but have applied for €100,000 for the next funding cycle. While this grant gives the Irish network sustainability, it is not sufficient to cover their core costs. To supplement state funding, they also receive €4,000 per year in membership fees as well as other grants, project-based funding and funding from EAPN Europe. In total, they received €140,000 in 2021.

Similarly, EAPN Lithuania has three paid staff, with two focusing mostly on policy and the third working on day-to-day activities. However, EAPN Lithuania does not have core funding and the project-based funding they receive can vary all over the year. It can run as high as €120,000 or as low as €15,000. Moreover, at the beginning of 2022 their funding situation was unknown and they were thus operating on reserve funds. Over the past few years they have had an average budget of around €100,000 and they usually work on one or two projects at a time. Despite having a secretariat, the Lithuanian network still relies heavily on the work of volunteers.

Operating on a larger scale, EAPN Austria has three full-time staff, as well as two part-time staff who work 20 hours and 15 hours per week each. They receive €70,000 in core funding from the state, €30,000 in membership fees and approximately €10,000 in other small supports such as donations. However, the bulk of their funding is project-based. They receive €300,000 for projects per year, most of which comes from government ministries. They have a total budget of over €400,000. However, the colleagues from EAPN Austria highlighted that their funding has increased in recent years due to funding opportunities related to the pandemic and they are unsure of whether they will be able to maintain this level.

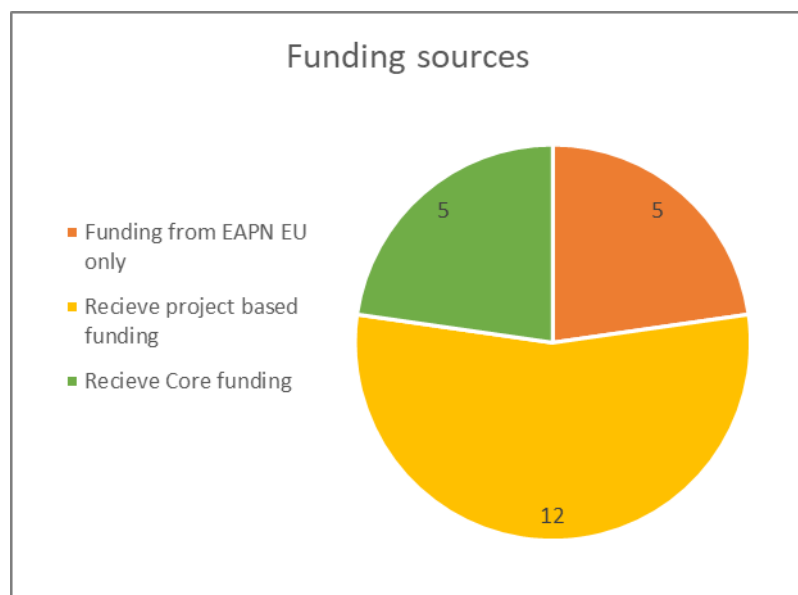
Similarly, the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network have three staff and will soon be hiring a fourth. The coordinator works full-time and dedicates about half of her hours to policy and advocacy work. They

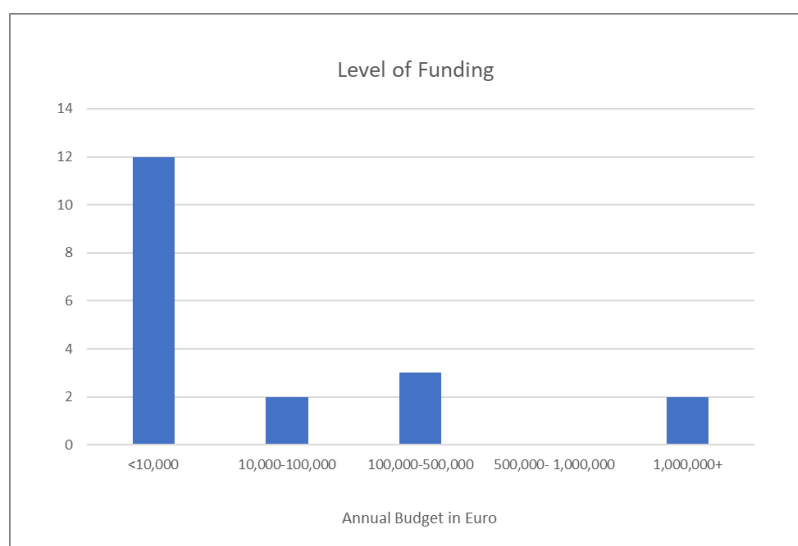
also have a policy and advocacy officer working at 80% capacity and they are in the process of hiring a communications and policy officer. Lastly, they have an administrative officer working half-time. The network receives core funding from the federal administration which is approved by the Cabinet for Poverty Reduction. This was increased in 2023 to €261,000. They also receive an additional fund from the federal government which amounts to €45,000, as well as the contract with EAPN Europe and another small subsidy. In total their annual budget is over €300,000.

Overall, having a permanent secretariat with paid staff increases both the capacity and sustainability of EAPN members. Nonetheless, several of these networks shared that limited human resources and budgetary constraints negatively effect their policy and advocacy work in terms of scope, depth and impact.

### *Large Networks:*

EAPN Spain and EAPN Portugal can be seen as exceptions in terms of capacity as they both have a budget that is several times larger than any of the other networks. EAPN Spain has an office in Madrid and employs 15 staff, including a research and policy coordinator. They receive both national core funding and project-based funding, which together amount to about €1 million. They are also currently waiting for funding for a large project that would bring an additional €2 million. Operating on an even larger scale, EAPN Portugal receives €1.6 million in funding per year. This includes a grant agreement with the state, which they have had for the last ten years and gives them a high level of sustainability. They have 45 staff, including a two-person research and projects department which is responsible for national and EU level policy. Furthermore, in local EAPN branches they have technicians that are engaged in policy work. For both of these networks, their level of funding and sustainability enables them to engage in a broader range of policy issues, in a more comprehensive way.





## **2. Policy**

This section will outline the processes through which national networks set policy priorities, the various influences on these priorities and the most common issues worked on. It will also present the different policy outputs that networks produced and the engagement of members with the policy work of the secretariat.

### *Processes for developing policy strategy:*

How policy priorities are decided varies between networks. Some networks, especially those with more resources, have a clear and formal system for deciding what areas to focus on. For example, EAPN Spain holds an annual seminar to verify their policy priorities and build their strategic plan. They also host a congress on fundamental rights every three years which influences the broader political agenda of the network. Similarly, EAPN Portugal's policy work is established each year in an annual working plan which follows a three-year strategic plan. EAPN Lithuania formulate annual policy priorities within the secretariat and this is then approved by the board and finalized at the general assembly. Likewise, in Cyprus policy decisions are made yearly by either the general assembly or the board of administrators. In Greece, the policy priorities have historically been set by the board, but the network has recently introduced a new structure where they send questionnaires to members regarding their priorities and use this as a starting point for their strategy.

In EAPN Norway, policy priorities are not decided at a general assembly but rather at their member meetings. They hold two large meetings per year, as well as smaller meetings every month, where members put forward topics that are important to their organisation. EAPN Czech Republic also discuss their priorities at their member meetings which are held four times per year. At the end of each year they create a strategy that is linked to the Poverty Watch and sets out some key areas of work. However, the Czech colleagues highlighted that this is just a loose framework and members tend to work very autonomously.

For some of the networks, decisions around policy priorities are made in a less structured way. For example, the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network highlighted that they do not have an overarching policy strategy but instead pick up policy priorities as they arise. They highlighted that this approach gives them flexibility, though it can sometimes lead to non-urgent priorities being neglected. Similarly, in Poland there is no rigid process for deciding the policy priorities. They meet with the ExCo at the beginning of the year to decide what areas to focus on, but this is not a formal plan and is amended at

each subsequent meeting. In Slovenia, EAPN is a new network and they do not yet have a method of establishing policy priorities. Moreover, as they have no paid staff and member organisations are very busy, it can be difficult to dedicate time to this task. EAPN Italy have a very informal process, wherein the President of the network will simply email staff every so often with a new area of work.

Regardless of whether policy strategy was set through a formal or informal process, most networks identified policy priorities on a yearly basis, sometimes within the framework of a longer-term strategic plan. At the same time, most colleagues also expressed that their strategies are flexible and are adapted on an ad hoc basis to respond to current events.

### *Influences on policy strategy:*

There are a number of factors that influence the policy strategies of EAPN national members. Of course, the differing political and economic landscape in each country plays a significant role in determining what issues the national network will focus on. For example, the colleagues from EAPN Estonia shared that if harmful policies are implemented then this will be a central focus of their work. Ten years ago, Estonia faced severe austerity and the network really mobilised around this issue. Now it seems that austerity policies will be introduced again and so this may have a significant influence on their policy strategy in coming years. Similarly, the Greek and Belgian networks both highlighted that the national political context always influences their policy planning. In particular, the different opportunities for policy work at a national level plays an important role. For example, colleagues from EAPN Netherlands shared that if they are asked by their government to give inputs on the national reform programme, then this is something they will invest in.

Another important factor in the formation of policy strategy is the interests of member organisations. As is highlighted above, members usually have a direct say in policy planning. Colleagues from EAPN Slovakia shared that in order to establish policy priorities they will listen to what the members want to see worked on. Similarly, in Portugal, the secretariat will engage with their members through a participative approach to formulate their policy work for the year. Moreover, the expertise and capacity of members is often a determining factor in selecting policy priorities. For instance, EAPN Lithuania shared that some of their members work on very specific issues and so the network is able to tackle these topics by collaborating with them.

Multiple different networks shared that the voices of people experiencing poverty have an important influence on policy strategy. For example, the Belgian network highlighted that their policy priorities are grounded in their participation work. They organise consultations and interviews with people experiencing poverty and base their policy analysis on these inputs. In Austria, the policy strategy is decided upon by a steering group which people experiencing poverty are involved in. Similarly, the Hungarian network shared that people with direct experience of poverty are included in decision-making around policy. Even when PeP are not directly involved in the policy making process, they still influence how priorities are set. For example, in Spain, the network considers the conclusions of the national PeP meeting in their strategic policy planning. Similarly, the colleagues from EAPN Macedonia shared that they consider what is most important for PeP when deciding their policy focus.

Budgetary constraints also have an influence on policy strategy. Indeed, in Macedonia the biggest factor in determining what policy areas to work on is whether or not they can follow a policy issue without spending money. Similarly, EAPN Czech Republic highlighted that because they are a voluntary network they cannot cover a wide range of policy issues. As outlined in the first section of this report, most smaller networks report that their ability to work on a given policy area is contingent on access to funding. However, even for larger networks such as EAPN Portugal, the availability of project-based funding has some influence over what policy priorities are pursued.

### *Most common policy priorities:*

While members work on a diverse range of topics, certain policy issues were mentioned again and again throughout the interviews. The most frequent policy issue highlighted was social welfare, with colleagues from twelve different networks identifying this as a priority. While most networks focus on the adequacy of social benefits, other issues affecting social benefit recipients are also considered. For example, EAPN Norway work on the right to free legal aid for recipients of social welfare and in EAPN Sweden focus on the complexity of social support systems and the interactions between the people experiencing poverty and public authorities. Furthermore, the Belgian network works on the system of statutory cohabitation, under which people are subject to cuts in their welfare payments if they live with others.

Of the networks that mentioned social welfare as a priority, Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Estonia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, Greece, Cyprus and the Czech Republic all shared that they work on minimum income specifically. EAPN Ireland highlighted that adequacy of minimum income is their most important policy issue and that they raise this at every opportunity. They shared that the European Minimum Income Network assisted them in beginning this work. Similarly, minimum income is a key priority for the Belgian network. They work to ensure that Belgium is a strong voice for minimum income at the European level, including in the Council and during the Belgian Presidency. In the context of a smaller network, EAPN Estonia have addressed the issue of minimum income within the Poverty Watch. In the most recent report of the Poverty Watch they highlighted the need to index subsistence benefit during times of high inflation and this message gained some traction.

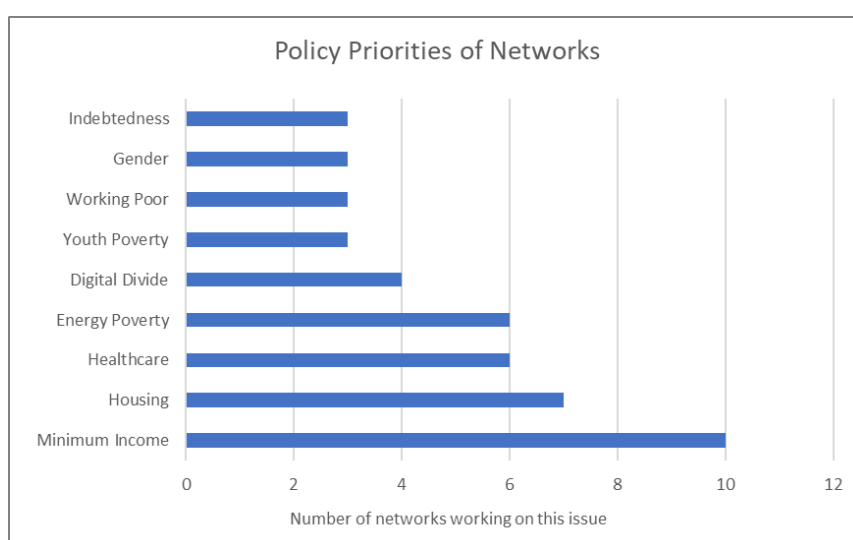
Another key policy issue for multiple networks is social services, particularly healthcare. EAPN Finland shared that their largest concern is the cost of healthcare and that one of their two permanent working groups is focused on health costs, illness and economic distress. EAPN Germany also has a working group focused on reducing the cost of healthcare. Moreover, the colleagues from EAPN Norway highlighted that dental and mental health care are among the oldest priorities of the network. They want to see universal and free dental care, as well as better mental health services for low-income people. At EAPN Slovakia they have a focus on the relationship between mental health and poverty. They have partnered with EAPN Malta to apply for funding for a new project focused on strengthening the physical and mental health of people experiencing poverty. Lastly, at the Belgian Network, they are working specifically on access to healthcare for undocumented people as this has come to their attention as a significant issue in the Brussels region.

Energy poverty and the green transition are also a priority for several EAPN national members, including Belgium, Hungary, Spain, the Netherlands, Croatia and the Czech Republic. In EAPN Hungary they have been working on energy poverty for several years. In the past, they had a successful energy poverty project based in a region that was particularly affected by the issue, but this work was defunded. They have now partnered with another NGO and begun a new project on energy poverty on the local level. The project is in its early phases but is grounded in community development and including those most affected by energy poverty in decision making. In EAPN Spain they work on both energy poverty and the just transition. They have received funding to monitor the energy consumption of vulnerable households and are particularly focused on the impacts of climate change on marginalised populations. At EAPN Cyprus one of their members has expertise in energy poverty and so they are also quite active in this area. In addition, EAPN Greece are discussing the possibility of working on energy poverty and EAPN Cyprus shared that they would like to work on this topic but do not currently have the resources to do so. The colleagues from Cyprus suggested it would be useful for EAPN Europe to provide training on energy poverty to the national members.

Another policy topic frequently mentioned by the national networks was housing. EAPN Austria, Belgium, Norway, Spain, Slovakia, Portugal and Croatia all listed affordable housing and social accommodation among their policy priorities. For example, EAPN Slovakia have applied for funding for a European Project, in collaboration with EAPN Netherlands, which would support them to produce policy papers on the housing first model. The aim of the project is to see the construction of new affordable accommodation for people experiencing poverty. EAPN Belgium highlighted that housing and homelessness is a major priority for them as this is an issue that is raised again and again by people experiencing poverty. Moreover, they combine the issue of housing with energy poverty to highlight the importance of access to renovations and energy efficient accommodation.

While the topics mentioned above represent the most common policy priorities highlighted, members reported working on multiple other issues. These include in-work poverty, youth and child poverty, the digital divide and the gendered dimensions of poverty. While multiple national networks follow the secretariat's work on the semester, only the largest networks, Spain and Portugal, listed EU policy among their priorities.

It is worth noting that the scope of policy issues covered varies a lot depending on the size of the network. Smaller networks tend to have a narrower focus due to resource constraints. For instance, EAPN Macedonia shared that they had no specific policy priorities besides youth poverty, while EAPN Cyprus focus mostly on the Working Yet Poor project. In contrast, the larger networks have the capacity to cover a wider scope of policy topics. EAPN Spain has eight working groups engaged in different policy issues including employment, housing, and European funds. Similarly, EAPN Portugal identified twelve different policy priorities ranging from local participation to European level work. Overall, however, the bulk of members reported working on three or four policy areas, usually relating to minimum income, social welfare and social services.



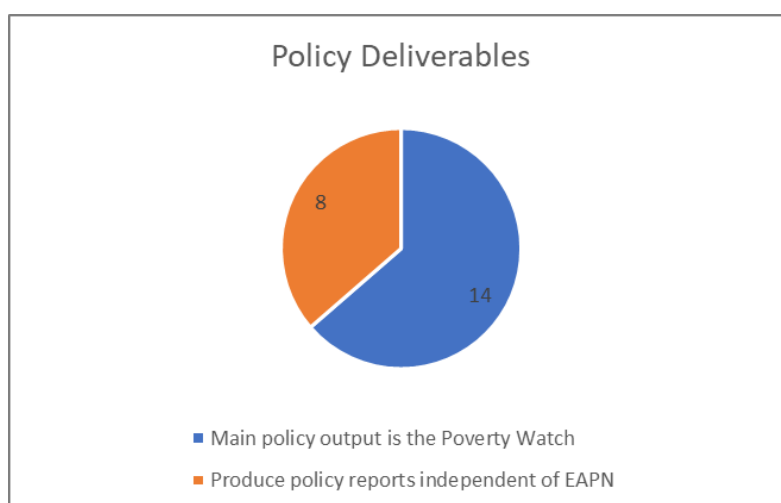
### *Policy Deliverables:*

As is to be expected, the larger networks reported the most extensive policy outputs. The policy work of EAPN Portugal includes position papers, studies with recommendations, briefings and so on. They also host seminars and conferences to mark the publication of policy documents. Similarly, the Spanish network carries out substantial policy work. They publish an update once a year highlighting their outputs in this area, such as their annual survey, joint unemployment report and other key policy instruments. They also engage proactively with the European Semester, producing proposals for the National Reform Programmes and working closely with the semester representative.

Though other national networks sometimes lack the resources to carry out policy work on the same scale, many nonetheless produced policy documents and other concrete policy deliverables. For example, EAPN Finland have two independent policy working groups, one for families in poverty and the other for health costs. These groups build up data and produce reports on their area of focus. Significantly, these reports always align with the views of people experiencing poverty. EAPN Austria work in a similar way. They have a social policy group which is made up of 10-15 members and publishes policy documents. One focus of the group has been poverty in the context of economic crisis. They also have several other independent working groups covering different issues, including social welfare and social rights in the European context. EAPN Belgium shared that whenever they take on a new policy priority, they will produce a report on this issue in consultation with people experiencing poverty. They have also produced a manifesto for the upcoming elections that is structured around their current policy priorities and which they can use for campaigning purposes.

For networks with less capacity, policy work is carried out on a smaller scale and in a more reactive way. For example, in EAPN Slovenia, they produce responses to relevant legal or policy proposals going through parliament. This work is usually led by groupings of three to five member organisations, who gather information to strengthen their position in relation to the proposal. Similarly, in EAPN Netherlands, they will provide their input on new legislation or policy if they can do so, but do not have the capacity to proactively write longer form policy documents. Indeed, most voluntary networks are not able to produce position papers and instead focus on less time consuming policy activities. For example, colleagues from EAPN Croatia shared that they hold events on different policy issues, while the Estonian network participate in research projects on social policy in partnership with local universities.

Overall, it is important to note that for most networks, including EAPN Sweden, Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic and Estonia, the Poverty Watch is their main or only policy output. Some of these networks, such as EAPN Cyprus, found that policy work is particularly resource intensive and that it is more efficient for them to focus on advocacy actions instead.



#### *Engagement with EAPN Europe:*

The level of engagement with the policy work of EAPN Europe varies quite a lot between networks. For a number of reasons, some colleagues reported that EU level work is either not relevant or not accessible to them. For example, EAPN Hungary highlighted that the discussions in the EUISG are often not applicable to their work because they have no opportunity to contact their government.

Similarly, EAPN Poland felt that work done at the EUISG does not translate well to their national context because the Polish government does not adhere to EU soft law instruments such as the European Pillar of Social Rights. Colleagues from non-EU member states also highlighted that the EUISG is not always relevant to them. Moreover, some networks, such as EAPN Italy, said that a lack of resources limits their ability to actively participate in this group.

Nonetheless, most networks do engage with the policy work of EAPN Europe to a greater or lesser extent. EAPN Finland and EAPN Netherlands shared that they have synergy with EAPN in the sense that they work on many of the same policy issues as the secretariat. Members of EAPN Greece shared that they try to combine the policy priorities of the secretariat with the most important issues in their national context. Often, networks with more resources reported a deeper level of engagement with the EUISG. For example, EAPN Portugal actively incorporate the priorities of EAPN Europe into their strategic planning and take into account what is relevant at an EU level when setting their policy priorities. Their significant participation in the work of the secretariat allows them to create synergies between the national and European level.

Most colleagues expressed that engaging with EAPN Europe is valued by their network. EAPN Sweden said that the EUISG is the most effective group within the secretariat and that the information sharing between networks is very useful. Similarly, the colleagues from EAPN Estonia shared that while there is not all of discourse around the semester in their country, they find the EUISG a very useful space to share ideas and get an insight into what is going on in other networks. EAPN Norway see it as very important to be an active member of the EUISG and, likewise, EAPN Lithuania said they were quite involved in this group and take the work passed down from the secretariat very seriously. Lastly, the colleagues from EAPN Spain highlighted that information about debates and developments at the EU level is appreciated and that they try to carry out joint actions with EAPN Europe.

At the same time, some networks made suggestions for how the work of the EUISG could be made more effective. EAPN Greece highlighted that the work on the semester is very complex and it is not always clear to them what the role of civil society should be. For this reason, they suggested that the secretariat provide more information on what the networks can do with the semester at the national level. Speaking more broadly, the EUISG representative from the Czech Republic said that it is not always clear how the discussions and analysis presented in the EUISG can be translated into action on the ground. They suggested that the policy work in this group should be linked to concrete campaign plans that can be implemented by members. EAPN Czech Republic said they have become less active in the EUISG due to the lack of such a structure.

The Belgian network echoed these concerns. They stressed that members are not part of the Brussels bubble and need support to work on issues related to the semester. They also said there is a lack of structure surrounding the role of the national networks and that it has become unclear how members can use the work of the EUISG in their advocacy. For example, on the Council Recommendation on Minimum Income, they suggested that the secretariat should organise a joint analysis with the members and explain how this can be used in advocacy at the national level. They also suggested that the policy priorities of the secretariat should be more clearly communicated.

### **3. Advocacy**

#### *Advocacy tools and tactics:*

A diverse range of advocacy tools are deployed by EAPN national members. Most networks reported holding events to raise awareness about their work including seminars, debates, press conferences and publication launches. In addition, some colleagues reported organizing more aggressive actions such as staging demonstrations and collaborating with trade unions to carry out strikes. Networks also used

creative tactics to get their message heard. For example, EAPN Austria shared that they had staged public events with a theatre group involving people experiencing poverty and engaged in flash mob style activism. Though advocacy work differs between countries in terms of both tactics and scale, some common themes emerged in the interviews.

Both large and small networks shared that the media was a key tool for advancing their aims. For example, although EAPN Cyprus does not have funding, they can use their connections with the press to ensure their message is heard. They identified the lobbying done with journalists as their strongest advocacy tool. Similarly, EAPN Estonia said that writing media articles is their most influential work. They will proactively write about relevant issues, such as child poverty, in-work poverty, social welfare and housing. Moreover, if a new law is introduced, journalists will reach out to EAPN for comment and they will usually provide quite an extensive analysis. In Hungary, gaining public support through the media is an essential part of their work, especially as they have very little opportunity to lobby decision-makers. Though the state controlled public media is hostile to them, they have a strong relationship with the independent press and this is an important asset.

The extent to which networks can publicise their message via the media differs between countries. For example, EAPN Ireland shared that although they issue press releases to highlight their opinions, these are not circulated widely enough to gain public attention or momentum. In contrast, EAPN Lithuania have had success in gaining more widespread public attention through their media campaigning. In their campaign on over-indebtedness, they published a large number of press releases and overtime became recognised as experts on this issue. As a result, they receive calls for media appearances whenever the topic comes up and have built connections in the press that they can rely on.

As well as traditional media outlets, multiple networks also shared that social media was a useful tool for them. As posting on these platforms is free, they are particularly beneficial for smaller networks with limited resources to direct towards advocacy. For example, EAPN Finland shared that they do not have the capacity for large-scale campaigning, but have been able to run smaller campaigns on social media. The colleagues from Italy, Cyprus and Austria also reported using social media to voice the opinions of the network. Moreover, EAPN Poland shared that social media is their biggest platform for campaigning. They produce information graphics and make memes about policy issues and circulate them on different sites. Larger networks, such as Spain, also said they rely on social media, especially to share important news.

In addition to media work, multiple networks highlighted engagement with politicians and policymakers as a key element of their advocacy strategy. The Belgian network try to influence decision makers at every level of the legislative process, beginning with the cabinet responsible for drafting the legislation and then contacting members of parliament to encourage them to put forward amendments. They also organise meetings between ministers and people experiencing poverty in order to highlight what is happening on the ground. Similarly, the Norwegian network said that they rely on meetings with politicians to influence decision-making, as this is less resource intensive than running public campaigns. They find that it is quite easy to get access to political leaders. EAPN Portugal are also usually granted any meetings they request with the government, making it possible to have their policy concerns heard directly.

For smaller networks, it is not always easy to maintain close relationships with politicians. For example, the Swedish network have difficulty keeping up a steady stream of advocacy with decision-makers. However, they are in the early phases of setting up a network of parliamentarians working on poverty and hope this will provide more opportunities for consultation. EAPN Estonia also work with members of parliament and shared that hosting events in the parliament building is a good way to increase the attendance of politicians.

As well as directly meeting with policymakers, networks used other tactics to influence political decision-making. For example, EAPN Cyprus shared that their campaigns sometimes involved gathering signatures from their members and sending a signed letter to the parliament. Similarly, EAPN Hungary will usually send a letter to decision makers as a starting point for their campaigns, though they will usually need to escalate further. Some networks also engage in political space through campaigning around elections. Colleagues from EAPN Netherlands shared that they run campaigns encouraging people to vote and advocating for candidates that align with the views of the network. Similarly, EAPN Macedonia said that they lobby candidates in the lead up to elections and present the changes they would like to see implemented in the coming term.

In combination with the tactics outlined above, most networks identified the Poverty Watch as an important advocacy tool. Colleagues shared that they promote the report widely on their social media, at conferences and through email campaigns. EAPN Slovenia highlighted that each member organisation will disseminate the report via their channels, giving it a wider reach. Many networks also shared that their Poverty Watch is promoted in the media. This increases the impact of the report while also providing EAPN with greater visibility. EAPN Sweden and EAPN Czech Republic said that they have a strong relationship with national newspapers and can rely on them to promote the Poverty Watch when it is released. EAPN Poland shared that for their most recent Poverty Watch, they gave an exclusive to a journalist with a large social media presence and because of this the report gained good momentum. Moreover, EAPN Slovenia, Estonia and Finland all highlighted that they are interviewed on television or radio about the report.

As well as publicizing the report to the general public, national networks also used the Poverty Watch to lobby politicians directly. The colleagues in Portugal and Norway shared that they send the report to all relevant ministries and EAPN Ireland said that the data from the Poverty Watch supports their ongoing campaigns and proposals to government. Moreover, EAPN Greece said that they have meeting with all political parties when the report is released each year and the Estonian network shared that the launch event for their most recent Poverty Watch was attended by the Mayor of Tallinn.

Another important advocacy tool for multiple networks is the Journalism Prize. The networks in Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Poland and Spain all host a competition for journalists, where a panel of people experiencing poverty select an article that they feel discusses poverty in a respectful way. The Croatian Network explained that the award ceremony for their Journalism Prize is hosted by the head of the department of journalism at the University of Zagreb and that the event has a big impact. They highlighted that every year, journalists from bigger and more prestigious outlets submit their work for consideration. Similarly, the colleagues from EAPN Finland shared that this campaign is greatly valued as it effectively influences public perceptions of people experiencing poverty. As a result of the Journalism Prize, people are less likely to blame individuals for being poor and the media and wider public have a greater awareness of the structural causes of poverty.

Overall, it is important to highlight that many networks do not have the resources needed to carry out advocacy to the level they would hope. For example, EAPN Poland shared that the impact of their campaigns on policy is low and to change this they would need greater resources to direct towards lobbying. EAPN Finland similarly highlighted that they would only be able to engage in larger campaigns if they had more funding. EAPN Slovenia said that staying on top of advocacy opportunities is challenging given their limited capacity and EAPN Sweden highlighted that resource constraints mean they are usually not able to follow up on the issues raised in the PeP meeting. For networks who struggle to carry out advocacy work independently, EAPN Europe can be an important support. EAPN North Macedonia shared that they find it useful to follow the campaigns produced by the secretariat, including by taking the Canva templates that have already been prepared and adapting them to the national context. Similarly, EAPN Greece shared that they do not have the capacity to lead on their own campaigns and instead support the campaigns of EAPN Europe.

### *Relationship with government:*

The relationship that national networks have with their government greatly influences the nature of their advocacy work. Indeed, the extent to which the voice of EAPN is recognised by the state largely determines the impact of their campaigns at the policy level. As is to be expected, different networks reported very different experiences in terms of their relationship with government. Some colleagues reported quite a positive environment for advocacy. For example, EAPN Portugal shared that the government seeks out their participation in policymaking, that their suggestions are often accepted and that their work is recognised. Similarly, the Finnish network shared that the political culture in Finland allows them to work closely with their government and that they are constantly invited to consultations.

Most EAPN national networks reported a relationship with the state that was neither hostile nor exceptionally strong. For example, EAPN Estonia shared that it is very easy to get access to members of government and other politicians. They are often invited by government to give their input on policy changes and they have translated many EAPN policy documents into Estonian for advocacy purposes. Despite all of this, it is difficult to see the actual impact of their lobbying and they find that politicians ultimately follow their party line. For this reason, they believe it is more effective to focus on awareness-raising among the public. Similarly, the colleagues from the Czech Republic said that there are plentiful opportunities to engage with members of parliament and government, including the Prime Minister. They are also able to participate in consultations with multiple government ministries. Nonetheless, they find their inputs are not actually incorporated into government policy.

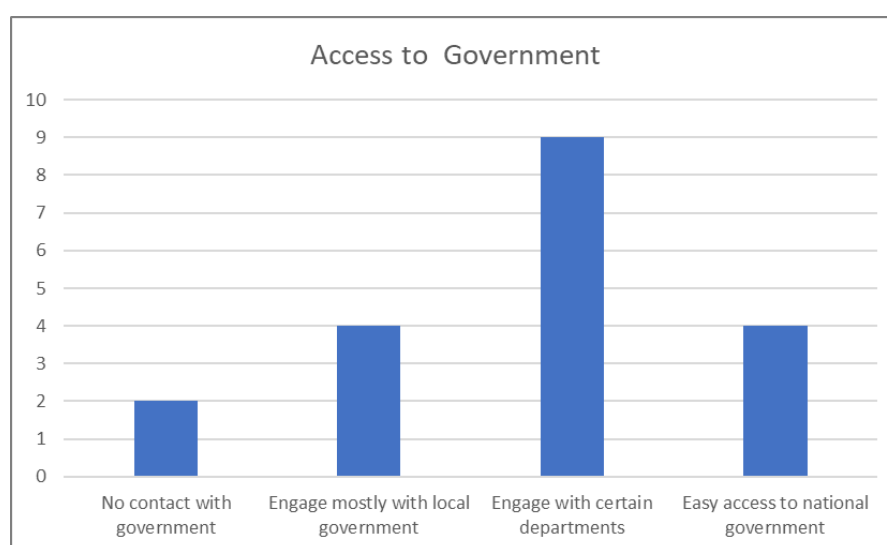
Some colleagues found certain branches of government to be more receptive to advocacy than others. For example, EAPN Cyprus shared that the Prime Minister does not consider the information provided by the network, but that they have a good and open line of communication with the Department of Labour. Similarly, the Italian network said that their presence in most areas of government is minimal, but that the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion takes their views into account. EAPN Ireland also highlighted that there is a certain level of respect between the network and the Ministry of Social Protection and EAPN Greece said that their main advocacy action is with the Department of Social Policy, who invite them to participate in monthly meetings. Lastly, the Belgian Network said that they have most success with ministers from progressive parties, who generally take their views into account.

Many networks also found it beneficial to engage in advocacy with local rather than national government. Colleagues from Germany shared that Social Ministers on the local level sometimes meet directly with people experiencing poverty. They find it works well to engage with representatives of local government first, before bringing their concerns to the federal government. Similarly, EAPN Netherlands expressed that lobbying at the local level and then moving up towards the national level has been a successful tactic. EAPN Croatia shared that while they are very rarely invited to consultations by the national government, the local government in Zagreb is very open to dialogue. Likewise, in Sweden the space for advocacy with national government is shrinking due to the rise to power of right-wing parties, however the Swedish network are in regular contact with local government.

Understandably, changes in electoral politics have a major impact on the relationship between national networks and their government. As highlighted by the Austrian network, their experience with the government is dependent on which political party is in control and whether their values align with that of EAPN. As a concrete example of antagonistic political groups gaining power, the Spanish network shared that while they generally do not work in a hostile environment with public authorities, a large autonomous region in Spain recently elected a far-right political party and it is unclear how this change will impact their work. Another issue for some networks is that frequent elections can lead to high levels of political instability and thus negatively impact on the opportunities for advocacy. For example, EAPN

North Macedonia pointed out that the constant change of government makes it difficult for them to establish a firm working relationship with the relevant ministries.

Despite certain challenges, the networks discussed thus far were all able to engage to some extent with the government in their countries. However, for other networks this is not the case. EAPN Hungary shared that they do not have any information on the decisions made at a national level or any connection to their government. Moreover, they have decided that they cannot cooperate with Orbán's far right party. This means that their advocacy work is not targeted towards the state but rather towards the people impacted by decision makers, as well as the international community. Similarly, at the time of their interview, the Slovenian network were not active in the political sphere and had no relationship with their far-right government. They highlighted that having no reaction from government is the best-case scenario as the alternative is to be subject to backlash or punishment.



#### *Achievements:*

Due to the nature of their work, some networks found it difficult to point to concrete changes that were directly as a result of their advocacy. Colleagues from Sweden expressed that it is harder to assess the impact of EAPN than other NGOs working on poverty. They said that while politicians tend to be very positive about their inputs, it is not easy to see how EAPN's work fits with the broader ecology of NGOs in Sweden. Moreover, some members highlighted that policy changes are achieved at a very slow pace and are usually influenced by a multitude of factors. EAPN Norway said they found it difficult to identify achievements because Norwegian politicians tend to act on their own accord and less so in response to the demands of civil society. The network therefore focuses on staying consistent and keeping up a steady stream of advocacy. Similarly, colleagues from EAPN Germany said that their view on achievement is that "if you drill through very thick walls then eventually something is happening in the hands of political leaders and decision makers". Ultimately, some networks found it difficult to name specific achievements because their resources greatly limit their capacity to carry out impactful policy and advocacy work. For example, EAPN Cyprus noted that a key achievement for them is keeping the network in operation despite the absence of funding.

That said, several networks were able to point to concrete developments that they helped contribute to. For example, EAPN Portugal shared that they contributed to the adoption of the National Anti-Poverty

Strategy, which they believe is very well structured. EAPN Lithuania highlighted that as part of a coalition, they contributed to the restructuring of unemployment payment during the Covid-19 pandemic in a way that offered greater protection to people experiencing poverty. They also highlighted an increase in minimum income in Lithuania as a key achievement. Similarly, EAPN North Macedonia highlighted their role in the introduction of a minimum income scheme in 2019. The Belgian network also contributed to positive developments in relation to minimum income. The payment is being increased in the direction of the poverty line, Belgium took a strong stance on the Council Recommendation on Minimum Income and minimum income will be a priority for the Belgian presidency.

The participation of people experiencing poverty was also listed as an important achievement by multiple networks. EAPN Finland shared that they have seen big changes in attitudes towards participation. People experiencing poverty are included in more events and journalists are more likely to ask for the views of people experiencing poverty on different issues. Similarly, EAPN Portugal highlighted that giving a voice to people experiencing poverty through different activities and documents is as an important achievement and EAPN Cyprus said that the formation of a national PeP team was one of their successes. As is highlighted above, participation plays an important role in policy formation for many networks.

One of the achievements most frequently cited by networks was gaining recognition as a voice on poverty in their country. EAPN Netherlands highlighted they are invited to speak at the Hague by ministers and for several years have been asked for their input on the National Reform Programme. Similarly, EAPN Greece noted that the departments working on social policy recognize the network and invites them to meetings as experts in the field. EAPN Spain said that they are recognised as experts on minimum income and EU social policy and that several of their proposals have been included in the national reform programme and the recovery and resilience plan. Likewise, EAPN Portugal highlighted their recognition as a network fighting poverty both by government and civil society as an achievement.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Policy and advocacy work is essential to the fight against poverty and social exclusion and thus to EAPN as a network. However, more than half of the networks interviewed were operating on an entirely voluntary basis and had very little resources to direct towards such work. As highlighted by the members, producing concrete policy outputs takes significant time and expertise. While networks can draw on the expertise of both member organisations and people experiencing poverty, they often lack the human resources to undertake substantial policy work. Thus, for most members the Poverty Watch is their primary or only policy deliverable.

Moreover, many networks struggled to carry out effective advocacy work that would increase the impact of the Poverty Watch or other policy outputs. While most networks participate in consultations with government, they usually cannot invest the resources needed to meaningfully influence political decision-making. Some networks reported that they were most successful in shaping public opinion, including through media work and the Journalism Prize. However even in this area, large scale public campaigning is generally beyond the capacity of national members.

Overall, while networks have made good use of the resources at their disposal, for most the policy and advocacy work carried out independently of the secretariat is minimal. Of course, networks with core funding and permanent staff have a far greater ability to engage in this kind of work. However, these networks are the minority and, with the exception of Spain and Portugal, also identified limited resources as a concern. Bearing this in mind, the following recommendations are offered as suggestions for how EAPN Europe may increase the capacity of national networks to engage in policy and advocacy work.

- Support networks to secure funding. While access to funding is largely shaped by opportunities at the national level, there are ways that EAPN Europe can offer assistance. Information on European wide funding opportunities and training in writing project proposals could be beneficial. The secretariat could also facilitate information sharing on successful fundraising strategies and help encourage joint funding applications between networks.
- Provide training and resources on complex policy issues such as the European semester and energy poverty. Gaining familiarity with technical policy content takes significant time resources. For smaller networks this can present an obstacle to active engagement with the EUISG and limit the scope of their work on a national level. Insofar as possible, EAPN Europe should support members to familiarise themselves with key issues.
- Clearly define and communicate the role of member organisations in EAPN Europe’s policy work. As highlighted in some interviews, national networks are not always well integrated into the policy process and are unsure of how to bring the work of the EUISG into their national advocacy. This can be improved by facilitating joint policy analysis with the members and developing a structured plan of action for national level work in relation to each policy area.
- Support national networks to carry out campaigns. Several networks shared that large scale public campaigns are not feasible given their resources, but that they follow the campaigns led by EAPN Europe. Providing templates and other campaigning tools that can be adapted to the needs of members can be useful. Moreover, and in line with the previous recommendation, tying EAPN policy work to coordinated European wide campaigns can help ensure greater impact at the national level.
- Facilitate idea-sharing between national members. As is highlighted in this report, national networks use a diverse range of strategies to make the best use of their limited resources, from the issues they prioritise to the target of their advocacy. There is no one-size-fits-all for this type of work and hearing perspectives from different countries can help networks identify the approach that is best suited to their context. Indeed multiple members identified idea-sharing as the most beneficial aspect of the EUISG and so creating additional space for this may be welcome.
- Aim to support to networks that are operating in a hostile political climate. As highlighted in the interviews, the work of EAPN Europe often presupposes that national members have a decent working relationship with their government. Examining how networks can carry out policy and advocacy work in the face of antagonistic political power can be a way to include networks that are struggling most. Moreover, as all national members are vulnerable to political changes, investing more in these types of situations can bolster the resilience of EAPN as a whole.



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