**Active Inclusion Sub-Group**

**Notes from the Meeting: 8th February 2014**

Chair: Robert and Rapporteur: Jeanne

Participants: Robert, Jeanne, Elke, Kart, Mari, Gunvi, Dag, Kristian, Paul, Thorbera, Vito.

1. **Minutes and Matters arising**

Paul: clarified that in Ireland it is the Dept of Social Protection not work and pensions.

1. **New EU developments**: Sian highlighted the main EU developments, from the policy briefing- including the study on reference budgets, the EESC opinion from Group 2 (trade unions), which is supporting a framework directive for minimum income, and the workshop in the Annual Convention.

Robert highlighted that on 5th April – conference on reference budgets: registration is free.

1. **New National developments**:

* Dag/Norway: We have a new government, but nothing has changed. Social democratic Party are copying conservative policy.
* Jeanne/France: Plan on Poverty for 5 years was launched last year. This year, at the beginning of January we had the evaluation, and had a lot of expectations of this first anniversary from the Prime Minister, with the other ministers – housing, social affairs and health care.150.000 social housing in progress, and on minimum income with increase of 5%, but no confirmation of budget for the plan for 4 years. So EAPN is worried about it. They agreed to make another anniversary in 2015 – but deep concerns about the impact of the 50 million reduction because of FR obligation to the 2 pack.
* Paul/Ireland: haven’t seen the draft of the NRP, but Active Inclusion was mentioned, and will be part of it, but it’s a narrow focus. We’re member of a technical advisory group on poverty and gaps. Paul went to the first meeting. This gives EAPN a say in the direction of research. Researching into the poverty reduction effect on social transfers – they want to blow their own trumpet, but disguises that poverty is going up. Reached the capacity of success of income transfers.. so worrying shift to incentives approach. Approach more on services, problem has been cutting income whilst improving services.
* Malta: We will participate in EMIN. We had a child poverty seminar, also on old people.
* Thorbera/Iceland: negative developments include increasing costs in health care system ie 46% on disability pension didn’t go to the doctor, and 48% on low wages. Positive: we have free dental health care for children, due to EAPN prosperity report – and the new govt didn’t change it. Welfare Watch working since the crisis, they did a final report, don’t know about the continuation. They propose the need for a plan to reduce poverty, with a group with vulnerable groups with representatives – disabled, single parents (28% below poverty line). Govt is working on a new housing plan – impossible for young people to buy or rent.
* Gunvi/Sweden: Would like to share 2 experiences: Sweden has had a reference budget. It must be high enough for a dignified life. We have research reports that show that if you have a generous limit for minimum income, it becomes cheaper in the longer, as it gives them a possibility for a decent life, without extra money. If it’s too low, they have to ask for more money, that costs more for administrative staff. Sweden has grown in inequality, due to right wing govt. We have an election in the Autumn, even right wing parties have seen it doesn’t work and say we must put restrictions on the search for profit and spend money on infrastructure.
* Paul: Can we use this example and evidence?..ie Right wing manifesto which calls for this different approach? Ie they are now building housing for rent – because of high levels of debt/ - they sold off social housing. Gunvi will look to see if she can provide links.
* Per/Denmark: We had a social/democratic Govt in 2010. It started promisingly, but now all benefits and pensions are reduced, particularly young people and disabled below 40. Cash benefits are below poverty threshold – we have a Danish official threshold on poverty at 50% of median income in 3 years. But no policies for this. But we can use it. On Services – we have more focus on better services on education and health care, ie it’s free and good quality, but not followed up with specific focus on those who can’t pass exams, or people who have complicated health care problems so there is still a gap, still excluded – jobs, health or education – very weak policies. Excluded people are getting more poor, and are losing hope. We are trying to fight this.
* Robert – why have they reduced the benefits?
* Answer: they’ve learnt the arguments from the Commission and Parliament/Council – with the UK influence. Going for 3rd way. They believe in a free social market economy. Reduce benefits means more jobs, widen gaps so you’ll get more rich people making initiatives. But it’s a false argument that more rich people makes society richer.
* Finland: We have good govt programme, still going on for 1 more year. Then we have elections. At the moment, we do have programmes to reduce poverty and exclusion eg reduce homelessness, legislative reforms for old people, and poverty target and youth guarantee. In the last year, with the economic crisis, unemployment is increasing, so difficult to find money, particularly at the municipal level.
* Elke/Belgium: we have some changes in the unemployment legislation. Now we see the impact. A shift from those leaving unemployment system, and depending on minimum income, and dependent on social welfare. 30.000 young people losing unemployment benefit. They will receive minimum income which is lower. People on MI have to fulfil many conditions, and are expelled from unemployment system, if they don’t find a job. The official reason is that they are not trying hard enough, they can lose MI. Welfare centres have more clients, but no more staff. They will receive extra money. BE has EP and federal and regional elections this year, and we are focusing on adequate MI, and are finalizing a manifesto with MI network alliance. Flemish network started a petition which is quite successful. We don’t want a new federal govt without raising the lowest incomes. On Services: The places for homeless in shelters are not enough, for the 3rd year. Lucky it’s a warmer winter. It’s very cold. 200 places foreseen. But govts pass the buck to other levels of govt.
* Vito: In Belgium, there is expulsion of EU people? Do you know anything about it?
* Elke: There is growing conditionality, for people from other EU. They have to prove that you want to work, and find a job – it’s a contradiction. People then have their benefits cut.
* Robert: Luxembourg – MI scheme, it is still on the agenda – MI should not be the same for all. Biggest problem is housing. So we want specific housing benefits.(Rent, daily living and special treatments). No amount set for daily survival – this is a political challenge. Also a success in asking for reference budget, to get more evidence. After a year, the govt has agreed to set up a Ref budget with a project of 2 years – but the MI scheme will be reformed before the end of it.
* Vito/Italy: MI project has given some good ideas to build support. Other good news is a new local/regional alliance against poverty and social exclusion.

1. **Active Inclusion outputs – finalization**

* Letter will go to final group this afternoon and will be optional to be use.
* Finalizing leaflet discussion
* Paul – can send some points by email.
* In the AI Recommendation it’s useful to highlight the right to participate/right to information and to appeal.

**ACTION POINTS**

* Send any comments by next Monday.
* Sian to finalize and to go to the EUIS for final comments, following discussion with Communication team.

1. **Minimum Income project**:

* Fintan presented the latest from the project: Last year in the PeP meeting, very good work was done on reference budgets. We’ve got the final text and that will be available, and a student could work on it.
* New project on Reference Budgets mentioned by Sian is run by Bea Cantillon. Fintan will send a list of who is working on this in different countries.
* Reference budgets are not straightforward. It depends on what’s your ambition: can drive it up or down. We want a level for a dignified life – so we have a high expectation, and this is the criteria in the best-produced ones.
* EMIN: 5 national members are here in this group – tested/piloted and 26 will have 1 year to do some work.
* The majority of the group knows the basics about the EMIN project, but didn’t know about the blog. Fintan will promote the blog, so try to distribute it further and automatic updates on new developments.
* EMIN is not EAPN, but EAPN is the driving force. Most of the ideas built on EAPN ideas and work, and Sian tries to make sure that the EAPN ideas are brought in, but also EAPN is coordinating at the national level, with members from the EXCO and EUIS.
* 2 year project with a million Euros, but not so much between all the countries. 2 Thematic partners – AGE and FEANTSA. In the European management group – trade unions, independent experts, regional authorities and Belgian Govt.
* 2 key objectives

1. Awareness –raising: why minimum income is good for people and society – making the case, countering the current tendency. Try to make visible that govts have made commitments.
2. Try to make some progress, on accessibility and adequacy – with national and EU road maps.

What areas?

* Adequacy – 60% at risk of poverty threshold is very important, but ref budgets could be used to test how adequate it is, and give a more coherent picture of what is needed.
* Coverage – new issues of social tourism for benefits. New discussions in DE and UK, attacking the Commission. We want to counteract this. Question of age is also increasing. New tendency to have different schemes, under 25 under and over 25, with less generous for young. In France you have to be 25 to get it at all.
* Take up- conditionality – is it necessary to have proof of search for employment? What’s the position of homelessness.
* 5 pilots also look at link to Structural Funds

Next steps

* 5 pilots are making a report, and looking at barriers and trying to identify some steps, building a consensus to move forward. There will be a meeting/conference in all 26 and 5 – ie 31 up to October, with some support for transfer.
* Key Dates: 6th November is the final conference in Brussels with final version of EU roadmap. 11-12 September is Peer Review for Pilot countries. So all to have draft reports by end of May.
* New info eg EESC opinion is on the blog, also 5 pilot countries reports and synthesis report. 1st conference in Paris report.
* EU Road Map: this came out of the Paris conference. Fintan will circulate the text, so first comments by end of March, and new input from conferences, based on previous EAPN work.
* 2 main priorities: 1) Doing work to build towards a framework directive - trying to build on this, and 2) how to integrate this topic in EU processes, eg in Europe 2020 and the Semester - CSRs, and in the NRPs. Trying to build consensus at EU level. Working with a round table of civil society actors, we’ll have a 2nd meeting. The sponsors of the project are Frederik Daerdens and Pervenche Bères – so they have set up a meeting with MEPs and looking to see how we can progress. Now the question is how to reach the ministers and the SPC. ie want some ministers who want to sponsor a framework directive – EAPN will develop a distinct campaign. In May at the EUIS hope to discuss the Road Map in more detail.
* Per and Elke: it is a meaningful project, building on EAPN work. Working with different actors to identify barriers and solutions. The understanding of minimum income from the employers and all others is very different. This liberal idea that you should cut down minimum income, is coming from the employers.
* Elke – we’ve learnt a lot about alliance building eg Christian Trade Union, can give us more weight, also academics, our problem is the govt is in our network, and in the MC at EU level. We agree with the aim, but difficult to find agreement on the realization, when we want to stop conditionality, when they are increasing it. Last meeting had small meeting about this with the 5 countries. It might be good to think in advance, who you involve and at what stage or area.
* Malta – we are trying to participate in this. How does MI differ from Min wage? Some confusion. We have a problem with the Minimum wage – if somebody isn’t working, can be better than
* There should be a relationship with MI and Min wage – now that Germany has agreed, there is some shift, but still not broad agreement. We make the argument is to ensure adequacy of MI then minimum wage should be better.
* Sian: EAPN has used the argument of positive hierarchy between Minimum Income and Minimum wage – ie a decent level of MI, then a higher level for Minimum Wage. Got support of Trade unions during 2010 campaign. We know that ETUC tends to support idea of framework directive on MI because they can’t propose on minimum wage, but not clear from overall membership, who are against EU frameworks, as infringements on national collective bargaining.
* Dag/Norway – also issue of working poor who need benefits as well, so it shouldn’t affect ability to look for work.
* Fintan: Trade Unions, ETUI was on management ctee - but we should meet with ETUC as well.

**ACTION POINTS**

* Fintan will circulate info about the blog. Members should sign up to get the update.
* Fintan will circulate the Road map - Comments to Fintan by end of March.
* EUISG will do a follow up discussion on the next steps.