

Fighting Poverty in the EU - Which way forward for the 50 year old?

On 8-10 November 2007, EAPN held its eighteenth General Assembly in Budapest, Hungary. This was the first General Assembly of EAPN to be held in one of the Member States that joined the EU in its historic enlargement in 2004.

The General Assembly marked EAPN's contribution to the EU 50th anniversary celebrations with the key note theme: "Fighting Poverty in the EU: Which way forward for the 50 year old?"

At this General Assembly the Network welcomed into its membership **EAPN Poland and the Slovak Anti Poverty Network**. At the end of the General Assembly, the delegates adopted the following declaration.

In this 50th anniversary year of the EU, the delegates to the General Assembly stated that,

- Despite the declared objective of making a decisive impact on eradicating poverty by 2010, the gap between rich and poor is widening, inequalities and discrimination persist, and poverty remains on an unacceptable high level.
- Member States are increasingly interdependent, in a globalised world, economic and governance system, resulting in the reality that **social concerns cannot be solved at national level alone** but require inter governmental cooperation.
- Social and employment policies alone are insufficient to challenge current trends and policies that result in poverty and social exclusion, but major structural changes are required so that **all policies are directed towards the fight against poverty and social exclusion**.
- The political leaders of the EU and the member states have been failing to achieve social progress and the strengthening of social cohesion.

Nevertheless, the delegates acknowledged that in the social field, achievements can undoubtedly be noted, including:

In relation to Principles

- The commitment to human and social rights as reflected in the objectives of the EU, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the references to the European Social Charter.

In relation to process and legislation:

- Development of EU social dialogue
- Development of civil dialogue and support for the engagement of Networks defending the interests of people experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequality, support for the direct participation of people experiencing poverty, including the yearly European meeting of people experiencing poverty.
- The requirement for social impact assessment for major policy proposals.
- The possibility of agreeing common minimum requirements in the social policy field.
- Health and safety at work legislation.

In relation to putting poverty and equality on the agenda

- Putting poverty on the agenda through the Lisbon Agenda and the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion
- Gender Equality and Anti-discrimination legislation protecting against discrimination on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

In terms of solidarity

- The positive role played by the structural funds and in particular the European Social Fund and other European financial instruments and programmes promoting social inclusion.

To move forward and build an ambitious societal project for the EU, capable of **delivering a decent life for all**, we the representatives of NGOs working with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion across the European Union call on the EU and member states to accelerate their efforts to eradicate poverty by,

- Committing to an **ambitious 2010 EU Year against poverty** that leaves a lasting legacy at EU, national, regional and local level.
- Ensuring a real **integration of the social dimension into all EU policies** and to ensure that the “horizontal social clause” within the new EU Reform Treaty becomes the basis for the establishment of an EU **‘Social Progress Pact’** with the same level of ambition as the ‘Stability and Growth Pact’.
- Committing to a **social and sustainable development model** consistent with a social rights approach and with a clear central objective to deliver social cohesion. The economic guidelines that would underpin such a model should reflect the ambition to attain a socially just redistribution of wealth.
- Ensuring the **comprehensive and ambitious nature of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)** on Social Protection and Social Inclusion by ensuring that the future guidelines and the requirements for the National Action Plans on inclusion are sufficient to have real impact on EU, national, regional and local policy making and delivery to ensure a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty. The revised guidelines should also commit to the development of more comprehensive knowledge about trends in relation to wealth. A new EU poverty programme should be developed as a complement to the OMC.
- Committing to the development of strong tools at EU level capable of delivering **high level social standards** in all the EU Member States. Such a tool should guarantee access for all to decent levels of income and high quality services of general interest. The ‘Active Inclusion’ approach should be focused on making steps in this direction.
- Agreeing strategies aimed at **quality employment** accessible to people furthest from the Labour Market and which address the reality of ‘in work poverty’. The ambition of developing quality employment should address the need for fair wages, good work-life balance, decent working condition and security and sustainability should be given renewed priority. The role of Social economy as a key tool for implementing an inclusive labour market should be promoted more specifically.
- Committing to strengthening EU **equality and anti discrimination legislation and policies** and to ensure the necessary institutional arrangements to ensure the enforcement of the legislation.
- Ensuring that **structural funds are given their rightful place in the fight against exclusion** and ensure a better coherence between structural funds, the OMC on social inclusion, the Employment and overall Lisbon strategy.
- Developing and ensuring the culture, principles and methods necessary to support an effective implementation of **participatory democracy**. Special attention has to be paid to the participation of people experiencing poverty, exclusion, discriminations and inequalities.
- Reinforcing the role of the EU in **the fight against poverty in a global context**.

The delegates to the General Assembly expressed **their commitment to contribute to the development and follow up of this agenda**.