

EAPN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2009 – DRAFT FINAL DECLARATION

Social Progress in a time of Crisis (Building the EU WE Want)

On 11-13 June, EAPN held its twentieth General Assembly in Vienna, Austria. At this General Assembly, the Network welcomed into its membership EAPN Slovenia and the European Consumer Debt Network (ECDN).

The discussions at the General Assembly took place against the **backdrop of the current financial, economic and social crisis** and the delegates asserted that it is time to recognise that the current EU strategy of “growth and jobs” and “market liberalisation” is failing to protect and develop a social Europe, where everyone has access to fundamental rights. The record low turns out in the recent European Parliament elections demonstrates a long term trend of decreasing engagement and participation of citizens in the European Project. The advancement of extremist/racist and anti-European parties is a deeply worrying development. Now more than ever, Europe must prove its relevance, which is intrinsically linked to its capacity to contribute to the realisation of a fairer, more inclusive, anti-racist society.

This moment in time must be seen as an opportunity to make transformative policy changes that will have a real impact on combating growing inequalities and create a Europe where the aspirations in article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty, “*The Union shall (...) combat social exclusion and discrimination and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child. It shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among Member States*” are a reality.

Eradicating poverty in Europe is about a new vision for Europe – a vision that requires political willingness and action.

THE EU WE WANT:

Effective access to Rights and Dignity for all

There are no “deserving” and “undeserving” poor and it is time to once and for all break the stereotypes in relation to people experiencing poverty. Social rights are fundamental rights – health care, housing, education, adequate income – which must be available to all. The conditions must be created so that everyone can exercise their rights and break the cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty. Fundamental rights, solidarity, equality between women and men and equality for all, non-discrimination and democracy, must be the principles shaping policies aimed at ending poverty and social exclusion.

An economy at the service of people and public interest

Europe's economic systems must be capable of safeguarding people from poverty and social exclusion and must respect the primacy of social rights over market freedoms. Increased public investment and a fairer redistribution of resources and wealth must (re)gain a central place in designing both economic and social policies.

That all policies are mobilised to end poverty in Europe // Rethinking the system

Poverty is structural, generated and perpetuated every day through inadequate or badly targeted policies and the lack of political commitment. It is time to rethink the system, to imagine and put into reality policies where solidarity, social rights and the public good come first. Building a poverty-free Europe requires that all policies – social, economic, employment, education, housing – are mobilised in order to end poverty and that the policies at the different levels, European, national and local, are mutually reinforcing.

Mobilisation and participation of everyone

Mobilisation and action, of everyone, is central to change and in building inclusive societies. Strong and well functioning representative democratic institutions are essential to ensure the defence of the public interest. More participatory forms of democracy are necessary, at all levels and in all policies, where decisions affecting our lives are taken. The participatory structures must ensure that the voices of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are included. Transparency and accountability in policy-making process are essential to develop trust in our democratic processes.

Solidarity between the struggles against poverty and social exclusion in the world and in Europe

The European dimension of the fight against poverty and social exclusion cannot be dissociated from global challenges linked to demographic change, migration, climate change and decent work. The structural causes generating poverty are linked and increased solidarity between the struggles to end poverty is needed. The EU needs to become a global actor for trade justice, debt cancellation, poverty eradication and the application of decent work standards for everyone.

POLITICAL ACTION IS NEEDED TO BUILD AN EU WE CAN TRUST

- To put people and planet before profit.
- To put the economy at the service of social and sustainable development.
- To recognize the fight against poverty, inequality and social exclusion and the defence of fundamental rights as a priority challenge and pre-requisite for progress at EU and global.

WE CALL FOR

- 1) A new social and sustainable post 2010 EU strategy, which makes progress on combating poverty and inequality a pre-requisite.

- Make the implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Millennium Development Goals and the reduction of the poverty and inequality (in the EU and globally), a pre-requisite for progress post 2010.
- Establish new overarching objectives, prioritizing social cohesion and the defence of fundamental rights, delivered through a balanced architecture (economic, employment, environmental and social), which strengthens and reinforces the role of the EU Social Protection (pensions, and healthcare and long-term care) and Social Inclusion Strategies.
- Develop more effective tools to ensure implementation, including EU and national targets on poverty and exclusion, homelessness, etc, new multiple indicators to measure progress beyond GDP and effective use of EU budgets, including Structural Funds, to deliver social inclusion.
- Make a commitment to avoid social dumping, in order to gain competitiveness in the global economy. Labour rights, social welfare standards and progressive taxation systems should be protected and extended.

2) **A Social Pact – Delivering on Rights and Solidarity, which:**

- Challenges the causes of poverty by reducing inequality and achieving a fairer sharing of wealth.
- Transforms social protection into a springboard: guaranteeing adequate income, universal social security systems and access to quality social services.
- Creates pathways to inclusion: making an integrated Active Inclusion approach a reality.
- Guarantees access for all, to high quality training and lifelong learning opportunities.
- Extends labour laws and social protection systems to the new forms of employment aiming at the integration of disadvantaged people into the labour market.
- Creates new jobs for new needs: investing in quality social/green jobs and social economy.
- Challenges discrimination and promotes diversity.
- Promotes global social justice and equity.

3) **The building of a dynamic partnership for change**

- Implementing participative and effective governance involving people experiencing poverty and NGOs at all levels and stages of the policy cycle, through an effective civil dialogue.
- Ensure financial and other support to NGOs as agents facilitating the empowerment of people experiencing poverty and as service providers.