

## The European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty

The European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty is organized by the

**European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)**

with the support of the **EU Commission**

### **Concept Note and Background information for the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty**

Since its establishment, EAPN has been strongly committed to strengthen genuine participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion at all levels and contexts – from local to national and European and from community groups, local NGOs to national NGOs and platforms and further on to European organisations, networks and exchange platforms. Participation processes and forms are under continuous transformation and change as they are dependent on political, economic and social contexts and realities and therefore require constant work and efforts in order to be realized. The ongoing economic crises have raised extra challenges and obstacles to participation as resources allocated to the organization of participative processes have been drastically reduced. Despite the harsh economic conditions and lack of material resources EAPN continues to argue that the only sustainable way for developing sound strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion can only be developed, implemented and assessment with the direct participation of those affected by poverty and exclusion; the more difficult and pressing the economic conditions the more important is to allocate resources for participation and ‘co-produce’, ‘co-work’ with those affected by poverty and social exclusion to develop and implement the best economic and social policies.

Last year’s PeP meeting was aimed at bringing forward the views and perspectives of people experiencing poverty from different European countries on how meaningful participation can be achieved – where power relations are being reshaped and where citizens who do not usually have a voice and are excluded from political and economic processes, are included. Delegations shared experiences of different participation processes.

*People experiencing poverty and marginalisation have the right to value and express their own identity as citizens and create spaces to express their opinions. Participation is a social right that people experiencing poverty should use to shape social policies not only as beneficiaries or consumers in pre-determined programmes but as citizens exercising rights to have a voice and to participate. (Key messages of the 14<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty)*

This 2016 meeting of People Experiencing Poverty was dedicated to developing and bringing forward a vision of participation and empowerment and the conditions needed for it to be realized.

Participants were invited to discuss and analyze different forms of participation that we broadly categorize as:

- ***Participation in community life or local development projects***: concrete projects, actions or practices taking place at local or community level aiming to foster participation to bring change at community or local level;
- ***Participation as collective action***: -, where citizens, through collective action and mobilization organize themselves to claim their rights and to have their voices heard.
- ***Participation in local or national governance processes*** – this form of participation in governance processes can include, participation in local or national councils/forums, participation on advisory committees for key topics relevant to poverty and social exclusion, participatory budgeting, ongoing structured dialogue processes to engage with local or national governments to shaping policies or laws at national level
- **representative/elected democracy. Empowerment through participation**

## **BACKGROUND TO THE EUROPEAN MEETINGS – A QUICK OVERVIEW:**

The development of the European Meetings was linked to the Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion that was part of that method. It was directly linked to objective 4 of the OMC to foster the direct participation of people experiencing poverty. It was envisaged that people experiencing poverty would be involved in the preparation and follow up of National Action Plans and through the European meetings they would exchange experience regarding this involvement. Given the changes in relation to how the OMC operates this is no longer a base for the European Meetings.

However the commitment to the direct involvement of people experiencing poverty has been reconfirmed in high level Commission documents including: the declaration of the 2010 European Year to combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, the Platform Against Poverty and the Social Investment Package. There has been always a link made between the PeP meetings and the Annual Convention on the Platform against Poverty (previously known as the Annual Round Table on Social Inclusion). It was important that this link was maintained for the first Annual Convention on Inclusive Growth held in 2016.

Originally the format reflected the format of other types of consultations as part of the Social Open Method of Coordination and had quite a formal character. In 2013 the format was quite different, reflecting both a less direct Institutional involvement in the organisation of the meeting and the desire of delegates to previous meetings that

the European Meeting should be more assertive of their right to participate in their own development and that the meetings should be more visible. In 2015 the European meeting provided a space for people experiencing poverty to bring forward their input on policies to foster social convergence in Europe and thus create the opportunity for them to become makers and shapers of policies that affect their wellbeing. During the meeting people experiencing poverty put forward their own collective proposal for the structure of a social rights pillar putting at its basis European values, and social rights and continuing with dignity and skills, work, social protection and services and having at the top work life balance and a decent life.

### **ADDED VALUE OF THE EUROPEAN MEETINGS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY**

A catalyst for national participation processes: The EU meetings are the most visible point in the process but perhaps even more important than the EU meetings is the fact that the EU meetings act as a catalyst for national participation processes. This has been a key added value of the European meetings. EAPN has taken responsibility to prepare delegates for the European meetings and to ensure as far as possible follow up.

Gives visibility to the fact that the EU works on the combating of poverty and social exclusion: The annual meeting of people experiencing poverty has contributed to keeping poverty and social exclusion visible on the EU agenda and is a key moment to give visibility to the work done by the EU in the combat of poverty and social exclusion. Relative to the difficulties experienced to generate media interest in EU social policy issues the People Experiencing Poverty Meeting have been quite successful in terms of media coverage.

Contributes to policy making: The European Meetings have identified and contributed to some key areas of policy development such as adequacy of minimum income, child poverty, housing and homelessness, indebtedness, the links between discrimination and poverty (particularly the realities for Roma community), and the impact of liberalization on public services and the EU poverty reduction target.

A Barometer in relation to social and economic developments in Europe: In addition the meetings provide a 'barometer' in relation to social and economic developments in Europe. The meetings provide early warning signs of negative trends impacting on social cohesion and highlights positive practices emerging in different countries.

Supports People experiencing Poverty to become more active in their societies: The processes associated to this meeting assist in the journey from 'people experiencing poverty' to 'activists with direct experience of poverty' and past participants are now playing important roles in anti-poverty organisations. In addition there are examples of how the meeting bolsters the confidence of the participants and this has resulted in assisting in their access to employment. The meetings also stimulates projects which gives opportunities for further exchange and learning.

The Meetings are not a replacement of Anti-Poverty Organisation: It is not intended that the meetings would evolve into a new organisation of people experiencing poverty but rather that many of the people experiencing poverty who attended the meetings would be empowered to engage in existing organizations at the local, national and EU levels, where people experiencing poverty have an active participation/ownership or be a catalyst for the development of such organisations. It is also envisaged that the meetings will foster the participation of people experiencing poverty in existing consultations, or foster new consultation processes. The European Meetings do not replace the need for active engagement of the Institutions with anti-poverty organisations.

## **GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND PARTICIPANTS**

Objectives of the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty:

To empower the delegates in their journey from people experiencing poverty to activists with direct experience of poverty and to foster their participation in Anti-Poverty NGOs and relevant policy making processes at local, national and EU levels.

To facilitate exchange and learning and to stimulate further exchanges and joint projects.

To act as a barometer for social developments and trends in Europe and to influence and hold decision makers to account.

To give visibility for the EU actions to fight poverty and social exclusion

Who are the European Meetings of people experiencing poverty for?

Delegates

People experiencing poverty who are starting to connect to anti-poverty organisations and are interested to engage in policy making processes

Activist with direct experience of poverty and previous delegates to help with continuity

Guests

Rep of National and EU level Institutions (Political and Functionaries)

Rep of NGOs, Social Partners, Academics and other relevant actors