

9) **Mainstream the fight against poverty** across all policies through effective and participative social impact assessments, which ensure engagement of stakeholders. The development of an indicator for societal progress that reflects social and environmental well-being and that goes beyond progress measured by GDP would be an important tool to enable citizens to be aware of whether real progress is being made.

- In the light of the current economic crisis call on the European Commission to carry out participative social impact assessment of economic and tax policies and in particular policies related to wealth creation, redistribution and inequality.
- Call for the Commission and Member States to conduct social impact assessments to ascertain negative social consequences of proposed migration policies.
- Call on the Irish government to withdraw its opt-out and sign up to the EU 'Reception Directive', which provides minimum standards for asylum seekers, including the right to work.

10) **2010 has been declared the EU Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.** MEPs can play a positive role as ambassadors for the Year, in doing so they can help to ensure that the fight against poverty and social exclusion is given a high profile in the first year of life of the renewed European institutions.

- Act as an ambassador for the 2010 Year in Ireland.

Since 1990, the **European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)** has been an independent network of non-governmental organisations and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union. See: www.eapn.eu.

The **European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland** is a network of 150 community and voluntary groups in Ireland working against social poverty, affiliated to the European Anti Poverty Network. EAPN aims to put the fight against poverty and social exclusion at the top of the EU agenda and to empower members through information, advocacy and networking. See: www.eapn.ie.

The **Northern Ireland Anti Poverty Network (NIAPN)** is a lead organisation working with and for those experiencing poverty in Northern Ireland. NIAPN works together with individuals experiencing poverty, the voluntary and community sector, public and statutory bodies to develop a poverty free society. See: www.niapn.org.

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NIAPN ♦ Tel: +44 (0)28 9024 4525 ♦ Web: www.niapn.org



An All Ireland initiative of
The European Anti Poverty Network (Ireland) &
The Northern Ireland Anti Poverty Network



Ending Europe's Social Crisis: 10 Priorities for the new European Parliament

A Challenge for all candidates

The European Union is currently facing the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. The inescapable consequence is increasing poverty and social exclusion with many workers losing their jobs and people on low-incomes facing the threat of homelessness. Those who do not have jobs find themselves even further from the labour market, while families are driven further into debt, and people on the poverty line are threatened with cuts to or frozen benefits. At the same time, EU governments are financing astronomical bailout packages to financial institutions.

The dominant economic model, which has been supported by the EU's Lisbon Strategy, is based on the prioritisation of the market over social rights. Too often this model has exacerbated the position of the poor and undermined social commitments. It has failed to put the 'public good' at the heart of EU actions. The EU has prioritised liberalisation and defence of largely unregulated markets, at the expense of strategies that promote equity and social justice.

At the end of 2007 16% Europeans were at risk of poverty. Despite the boom, in Ireland the figure was higher than the EU average at 16.5%, while in the North of Ireland it was 20%. With rising unemployment and falling incomes this situation is rapidly degenerating. When it comes to poverty, some groups in society experience greater inequality than others such as; children, lone parents, those who are unemployed, people with disabilities, members of minority groups including Travellers and those living in disadvantaged communities. Income poverty for these groups is exacerbated by direct and structural forms of discrimination.

In Ireland the European Union has made an important contribution to social progress. Irish society in general and specifically those living in poverty, workers, women and others who experience discrimination have benefited from EU action. However the result of the Lisbon Treaty referendum in June 2008 demonstrates the demand of the Irish people that Europe do more and better. In a survey of EAPN Ireland members after the referendum, 70% of those who voted 'No' did so because they felt the Lisbon Treaty does not progress positive social objectives, while the Millward Brown survey also highlighted that the 'No' vote was much higher in less affluent areas.

In Northern Ireland the European Union is seen by many as a mechanism of bureaucratic control of relevance only to farmers and fishermen rather than an important political arena that can influence positive social and economic change. The EU Elections present us with an opportunity to lobby for real and sustained action from our candidates to act as advocates on behalf of our most disadvantaged citizens.

EAPN calls for a fresh start

The new European Parliament will have responsibility for preparing and implementing the framework to replace the existing Lisbon strategy. In doing this the Parliament must respond to the needs of those who experience poverty and exclusion. This response cannot be more of the same –the current market driven agenda does not work.

The financial crisis is not the only crisis facing the EU. Globalisation, climate change, economic recovery and demographic change are currently recognised as the key challenges. With 78 million people in the EU facing poverty and growing inequalities, there is a growing sense of uncertainty and anxiety. The EU must take urgent action to address these very real fears and anxieties. The European Parliament must be at the forefront of delivering social and sustainable development in Europe.

Across Europe EAPN is articulating 10 priorities for the new Parliament. In a cross boarder initiative the EAPN Ireland and the NIAPN are setting out their vision for the specific role Irish and Northern Irish MEPs can play in progressing the social agenda.

MEPs in Ireland and the United Kingdom have a strong track record in engaging actively with the social inclusion agenda. Consequently we believe the new Irish and Northern Irish MEPs through their influence within their European parties and in the European Parliament, have an important role to play.

Ending Europe's Social Crisis: 10 priorities for the new European Parliament

1) **Make social cohesion and the fight against poverty and inequality in the EU and the promotion of global equity a named EU priority** and a specific pillar of an integrated post 2010 social and sustainable Lisbon Strategy. The focus of the economic recovery package should contribute to this priority.

- Irish and Northern Irish MEPs have a particular responsibility to provide a leadership role within the European Parliament on social inclusion issues, and should engage with the relevant structures in the Parliament and within their political grouping to ensure a strong voice for strengthening social inclusion.

2) **Set and monitor EU and national level targets for poverty and inequality reduction as part of a highly visible EU strategy against poverty.** This strategy should include specific measures to address extreme forms of poverty as well as relative poverty so as to ensure a more equitable society. The strategy should be supported by a reinforced Open Method of Coordination on social inclusion and social protection and the follow up of the Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion.

- Irish and Northern Irish MEPs should undertake a joint initiative to establish common targets on poverty reduction on an all Ireland basis, which could then serve as a model for other European Member States.

3) **Set Benchmarks for active governance in decision-making processes at EU and Member State level, ensuring the participation of anti-poverty NGOs including people experiencing poverty**

- Proactively monitor governance standards and engagement with NGOs and people experiencing poverty in the context of the post 2010 EU strategies
- Regularly meet with people experiencing poverty, building on engagement in EAPNs all Ireland constituency meetings to be held in advance of the elections.
- Invite the Irish delegation of the annual EU Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty to meet with MEPs in the Parliament, and attend the annual meetings in Brussels

4) **Make progress on developing an EU framework to defend high level social standards and guarantee a dignified life for all.** A framework directive on adequate minimum income schemes as a follow up to the Recommendation on Active Inclusion (October 2008) would be an important step in creating such a framework.

- Call for the European Commission to propose a framework directive on adequate minimum income which is based on levels and conditions whereby people can live with dignity. MEPs should regularly follow up on this proposal including through the use of Parliamentary Questions.

5) **Ensure access for all to affordable quality services,** including social, educational, child care and health services, and housing, transportation, energy and water services. The specific characteristics of these services of general interest should be respected by EU law and an assessment of the impact of the privatisation and liberalisation of these services on social cohesion, poverty and inequality should be undertaken.

- Undertake a European Parliament own initiative report and study on the impact of privatisation and liberalisation of services.

6) **Put the commitment to 'Decent and Quality Work' back at the centre of the European Employment Strategy,** through analysing the causes of the rise in 'working poor' as well and the benefits of adequate living wages and keeping the focus on maintaining jobs and the creation of quality sustainable employment.

- Maintain focus in the European Parliament on the importance of protecting decent, quality work despite the economic downturn.
- Call for measure to foster the creation of "green and social jobs" that could combat climate change, address market failures, support economic recovery and give stable and quality work to many.

7) **Support the social economy and inclusive entrepreneurship** as vital sources of inclusive job creation and concrete support for those furthest from the labour market. Ensure this is reflected in EU employment policies and as a specific objective of EU Structural Funds spending.

- Highlight the barriers and support needs of the most disadvantaged communities and those most distant from the labour market.
- Encourage Member States and the European Commission to put in place supports for the social economy and inclusive entrepreneurship.

8) **Strengthen EU anti-discrimination legislation,** including the fight against discrimination on the grounds of socio-economic status and enhance enforcement of existing legislation.

- Call on the European Commission to monitor the implementation of EU anti-discrimination legislation in Ireland, including the functioning of the equality bodies.
- Support the development of a strong new anti-discrimination legislation, including the promotion of pro-active policies and measures (positive action).