

EAPN Ireland response to the European Commission Working Document “Consultations on the Future ‘EU 2020’ Strategy”



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EAPN Ireland

EAPN Ireland is a national community organisation and a member of the European Anti-Poverty Network. Its aim is to put poverty at the top of the EU and national policy agenda. It has about 150 members in Ireland who are mainly from national and local groups representing people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and groups and individuals who support the aims of EAPN. It works through the provision of information and training, policy work and working closely with other organisations. EAPN Ireland is committed to promoting the participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in decisions that affect their lives.

An essential part of the work of EAPN Ireland is to ensure that its members, including people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their organisations have a better understanding of the EU and actively contribute to its policy making at both EU and national level.

General Comments

EAPN Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Commission Working Document. We are concerned at the overall lack of focus in the Working Paper on the strengthening the social dimension of the EU. It is essential that any future strategy addresses the challenge of reducing the current levels of poverty and inequality in the EU.

The vision which dominates the Commission Working Document sees the collective goal as that of building ‘markets’ rather than ‘societies’ and the individual’s role as that of ‘consumer’ rather than of ‘citizen’ (in the broad meaning of the word citizen, rather than the narrower definition associated just to legal status). Within this vision the social is equated with ‘employment’ and social inclusion is reduced to primarily a skills and education agenda. While access to quality employment is a key factor for fighting poverty and exclusion and skills development and accessible education an important condition for building more inclusive labour markets, such a limited agenda does not recognise the importance of the European Social Model and the role this model has, and can, play in helping to reduce poverty and social exclusion in Europe. Such a limited vision fails to recognise that poverty and social exclusion remain one of the central challenges in the European Union and internationally. It also fails to recognise the impact of living in increasingly unequal societies and the impact this has on the well being of the whole of the society. Therefore the vision and more particularly the agenda proposed in the Commission’s Working Document misses the opportunity to set the EU on the path to a more social and sustainable future.

We propose that the following elements need to be at the heart of the EU2020 Strategy:

- Identify poverty, social exclusion and growing levels of inequality as a key challenge to be addressed in the EU 2020 strategy.
- Establish targets to reduce poverty and inequality at EU and national levels and new indicators for measuring progress that goes beyond the limited Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measure which is currently used.
- Ensure a highly visible and effective EU strategy to eradicate poverty and social exclusion and to reduce inequalities which ensures active participation of all relevant actors in the strategy including the European and National Parliaments, Social Partners and anti poverty organisations and people directly affected by poverty and social exclusion.
- Defend the importance of quality jobs that are capable of lifting people out of poverty.
- Ensure common efforts across all EU Member States to achieve high levels of social protection and in particular to ensure adequate minimum income schemes facilitating people to live in dignity.
- Recognise the essential nature of Services of General Interest (Health, Education and Social Services) as well as services such as transport, energy, water, sanitation.
- Ensure a greater link between anti discrimination policies and policies to combat poverty and social exclusion.
- Recognise the need to increase public revenue through tackling tax evasion/avoidance so as to safeguard vital public services and social protection systems.
- Ensure that the architecture to deliver the EU2020 strategy is delivered through four equal pillars: economic, employment, social and environmental in line with the vision for social and sustainable development.

Conclusion

The EU needs to ensure that as it progresses into the next decade it clearly implements an effective strategy for addressing the poverty and inequality which is unfortunately a reality for so many people in Ireland and across the EU.

In relation to the Commission's process for developing a strategy for post 2010 EAPN Ireland is concerned at the very limited time for a consultation process (publication on the 24th November open until the 15th January). This period does not give time for a more substantial discussion and contributions to the EU2020 Strategy. The short period for such an important consultation also does not allow real debate at national level or for the involvement of national or the European Parliaments. Therefore more time should be given for the consultation in order to build debate about this important strategy and to build ownership for the strategy among key stakeholders.

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