

EAPN Ireland Policy Briefing October 2010



- Europe 2020 Strategy
- Targets and the European Flagship Against Poverty

Overview: EU Social Inclusion Policy & the National Context

Increasingly, the European Union lays down the broad policy objectives in a number of key social and economic areas, including those related to poverty and social inclusion. As a result, European policy provides the framework within which national policy is developed, and in turn influences to some extent the programmes and funding priorities within which community organisations conduct their work at local and national level. Even though the presence of the EU may not be as visible as it was previously, when many community initiatives were directly funded by the Commission, European policy in the broader sense is probably more significant than it ever was, so it is useful for community organisations to become aware of major policy developments at European level. EAPN Ireland seeks to inform its members and affiliates of these developments, and the subsequent implications for our shared efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

In June of this year, the European Council (i.e. the combined heads of state) agreed on *Europe 2020 – A European Strategy for Smart Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*. This 10 year Strategy replaces the Lisbon Strategy (commonly referred to as the Lisbon Agenda), which ran from 2000-2010. Employment continues to be a central concern of this new strategy. Financial stability and the importance of Member States reducing their budget deficits is a further concern arising from the economic crisis. Poverty and social inclusion is another priority area, although EAPN Ireland has considerable concern in the context of how that priority will be developed and implemented. This Update outlines the main developments within the strategy.

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European Level Targets

5 EU headline targets:

1. Raise to **75%** the employment rate of women and men aged **20-64**, including the greater participation of young people, older workers and low-skilled workers and better integration of legal migrants.
2. Improving education levels, in particular by aiming to reduce school drop-out rates to less than **10%** and by increasing the share of **30-34** years old having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least **40%**
3. Poverty and Social Exclusion: promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least **20 million people** out of risk of poverty and exclusion. Measurement of numbers at risk of poverty and social exclusion is defined as an aggregate of three indicators (at-risk-poverty; material deprivation; jobless households).
4. Spending 3% of GDP on research and development (public/private).
5. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020, increasing the share of renewables in energy consumption by 20% and moving towards a 20% increase in energy efficiency.

The poverty reduction target, while not as ambitious as that initially proposed by the European Commission, is significant because it is the first such target agreed at EU level and directs political attention to this issue.

Implications at National Level

Member States have to agree on and develop their own targets to contribute towards achieving the EU targets. Member States are free to set their national targets on the basis of the most appropriate indicators, taking into account their national circumstances and priorities. National targets will have to be decided by November 12th.

National Poverty reduction target: The Irish Government will progress the development of the national poverty reduction target through the social partnership Technical Advisory Group which has one Community and Voluntary Pillar representative (Sean Healy, Social Justice Ireland).

The Irish Government position remains vague and undefined. The Government has indicated that it is open to looking at any of the agreed EU targets as a way of setting national targets.

Flagship Initiatives Explained

Europe 2020 contains 7 Flagship Initiatives which are the means of delivering on the targets, including:

- An Agenda for New Skills and Growth
- European Flagship against Poverty

There is currently very little detail with regard to the European Platform against Poverty. The Commission will produce a communication on the Platform in November.

EAPN has submitted an input which focuses on ensuring that at EU and national levels, all stakeholders are engaged in the process, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Poverty and social exclusion can only be reduced if those twin factors are tackled across all policy areas.

Process for Delivery

Member States have agreed on 10 Integrated Guidelines for Economic and Employment policies. These guidelines detail the overall objectives for the EU over the next ten years. They form the basis for Member States to draw up their National Reform Programmes (NRPs). Guideline 10 is designed to promote social inclusion and combat poverty. This forms part of the Employment Guidelines.

EAPN has called for social inclusion approaches and policies to be cross-cutting or mainstreamed across the National Reform Programmes and for a parallel and improved Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on social protection and social inclusion. A key issue is how people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their organizations will be involved in the design, monitoring and implementation of both processes.

It is not clear what the Flagship Initiative against Poverty might mean at Member State level e.g. whether Member States will have to submit National Action Plans for Social Inclusion as they did from 2000-2010, what structures have to be put in place etc. It appears that this process could now be delayed until 2011.

On the 5 Targets and National Reform Programmes the position is a little clearer. It now appears that bilateral meetings will take place in September and October 2010 between Governments and the Commission, to decide on the targets, and the preparation of the National Reform Programmes based on the guidelines. A draft NRP will have to be presented by November 12th including the national proposals on all targets and the main obstacles to “growth and jobs” and completed by mid-April 2011.

EAPN Ireland Analysis

The formulation of targets – and the accompanying strategies - is an important development as it sets out tangible objectives to be achieved and commits to the development of definitive indicators against which to measure progress. There is also some indication of an improvement in stakeholder participation in the process – through the proposed Flagship Initiative against Poverty – although it remains to be seen how this will develop and what it might look like at national level. EAPN at European level has developed a proposal for a Platform against Poverty which would include all stakeholder interests, including relevant NGOs at national and European level.

This proposal also outlines a role for the stakeholders in devising and implementing the EU and national strategies, and sets out proposals for supports that would be required to monitor progress across the Member States. A similar proposal, tailored to the Irish context, is being developed by EAPN Ireland. This would transform the existing Social Inclusion Forum mechanism into a more robust and engaging process and would enhance the involvement of community organisations involved in social inclusion work.

EAPN also believes that developing such a Platform would bring greater coherence between social inclusion programmes and delivery structures; resulting in the better outputs that will be required under the 2020 target. We'll be seeking your views shortly on how this might be developed to meet the needs of the community and voluntary sector.

In terms of what is required at national level, EAPN Ireland takes the view that national targets for all three indicators are needed (at-risk-poverty; material deprivation; jobless households). In terms of the targets, it is useful to remember that the targets measure different things, and when taken together, represent quite a powerful tool for monitoring and mapping trends. At-risk of poverty measures income inequality and distribution of wealth, while material deprivation measures more extreme forms of poverty or the lack of basic essentials. These also need to be broken down to ensure that poverty levels for different groups are greatly reduced including those related to age, family types, employment status, education levels etc

A range of indicators – beyond the three suggested by the EU Commission - should also be retained to measure progress and enable the state and civil society to monitor and compare progress across different Member States. At a national level the Minimum Essential Budgets project, developed by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice should form part of this approach. Other specific targets on income, services, employment, etc exist in National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. EAPN Ireland believes that only an integrated and strategic approach – that takes account of all appropriate indicators and measurement tools – will be effective in mapping and tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Further Information

- EAPN (Europe) Lisbon Strategy: <http://www.eapn.eu/content/view/99/68/lang,en>
- EAPN Ireland, Anti-Poverty Strategies: <http://www.eapn.ie/eapn/policy/social-inclusion/anti-poverty-strategies>
- Europe 2020 - European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm
- Lisbon 'Growth and Jobs Strategy' European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/index_en.htm

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