

# MAKING EUROPE WORK

## EAPN IRELAND GENERAL ELECTION DEMANDS

EAPN Ireland wants the new government to reinvigorate Ireland's contribution to social Europe and fight to keep Europe on track in combating poverty and social exclusion. This election document is intended to outline how the successful candidates in General Election 2011 can work to secure a positive and progressive role for Ireland in the European Union.

General Election 2011 comes at a critical juncture in Irish history. The next government will have to pick up the pieces of a society undermined by a deep economic, social, and democratic crisis. The challenge must be to put Ireland on the path to a fairer, more equal and more inclusive society. To do this the new government will need to drive a more progressive European Union.

Despite progress which has been made in reducing poverty and social exclusion, recent years have witnessed startling unemployment increases, an undermining of frontline services, reductions in direct income supports for the most vulnerable, decreases in the minimum wage, and increased taxes for those on low incomes, resulting in raising indebtedness and poverty. The realities facing those experiencing poverty are further undermined by the decimation of much of the community infrastructure which supports them and the institutional infrastructure dealing with poverty, equality and human rights.

Despite some progress during the Celtic Tiger towards the target to end consistent poverty by 2016, poverty increased from 4.2% to 5.5% between 2008 and 2009 and in the same period the percentage of those in material deprivation went up by 25% with over 17% of the population now unable to afford at least two basic essentials. 14.1% of the population is at risk-of-poverty, however the risk is much higher for children (18.6%), unemployed people (24.8%), lone-parent families (35.5%), those not at work due to illness or disability (21.7%) and single adults under 25 (23.3%) than the general population. Specific groups remain intransigently over represented in terms of their experience of poverty and exclusion including people with disabilities, members of minority groups including Travellers, asylum seekers, LGBT communities, and those living in disadvantaged communities; 65% of children living in poverty are in one-parent families. Across the social spectrum women continue to disproportionately carry the burden of poverty and social exclusion.

The Irish deal with the EU, the IMF and the European Central Bank demonstrates that the EU rhetoric that there can be 'no sustainable growth unless benefits accrue to all' is mere window dressing in an agenda which focuses almost exclusively on growth-enhancing initiatives and the need for fiscal consolidation, pressurising Member States to reduce public deficits quickly and suppress wages. The EU has just committed to lifting 20 million people out of poverty by 2020 and yet it is rapidly getting further and further away from realising that objective.

The EU is not a stand alone institution which can hand down dictats without accountability but rather it is the sum of its member states. It is up to the governments of Europe to move in a new direction, if they want the EU to succeed as a common project.

Established in 1990, the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland is a network of groups and individuals working against poverty. It is the Irish national network of the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN Europe), which has two decades of experience in advocating for progressive social change at European level. See: [www.eapn.ie](http://www.eapn.ie)

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EAPN Ireland wants to know how the next government will play a positive role in shaping a Europe which can make a real contribution to ending poverty and social exclusion. We are asking all General Election candidates to commit to:

1

Ensuring that in monitoring and evaluating the **Europe 2020 strategy** for *smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* that the European Commission and the member states give equal attention and urgency to addressing economic, environmental and social priorities.

2

Ensuring that the EU takes action to realise its **target** to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020. This includes meeting national targets and monitoring other member states to ensure they meet theirs.

3

Driving a renewed process of reporting and stakeholder **participation** at the heart of the European Platform Against Poverty. People experiencing poverty and their representative organisations must be at the heart of the decision making process. This includes securing the continuation and expansion of EU funding programmes and structural funds to ensure their accessibility to national and local level community and voluntary sector organisations.

4

Securing the full implementation of the European Commission Recommendation on *the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market* (2008), emphasising the significance of an integrated approach to ending poverty and exclusion that addresses adequate income, access to quality services and access to an inclusive labour market.

5

Working towards the adoption of a Framework Directive on **Services** of General Interest, and sectoral directives on social and health services, including the development of equality and poverty impact assessments in the design and delivery of public sector services.

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6

Protecting the incomes of low paid workers in Europe, including the reversal of cuts to the **minimum wage** and recent taxation of the low paid in Ireland, along with the renegotiation of relevant provisions of the Irish (and other) agreements with the EU, the IMF and the ECB.

7

Fighting for the adoption of an EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Income Schemes, ensuring an adequate standard of living for all EU Citizens and, at a minimum, raising basic income above the poverty threshold. A first step should be the reversal of cuts to **social welfare payments** in Ireland.

8

Promoting the establishment of an inquiry into high pay and the impact of **income inequality** in the European Union and ensure that the findings are acted upon.

9

Ensuring the full implementation of the Lisbon Treaty's **Social Clause**, and support the development of a transparent and effective process for the social impact assessment of all EU policy.

10

Ensuring the full implementation of the Energy Package and particularly the requirements to address **energy poverty** in the common rules for the internal market on electricity. A key step would be ensuring the national action plan on energy poverty is completed through wide and effective consultation and implemented in full.

11

Fighting for strengthened EU **anti-discrimination** legislation, including the fight against discrimination on the basis of socio-economic status. This includes ensuring that national equality, inclusion and human rights infrastructure is adequately funded and fully independent, and ensuring the EU implements the Gender Pact.

12

Working towards realising the full potential of the **Charter of Fundamental Rights**, which was given legal standing through the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.