

Introduction

EAPN Ireland has continued to work to put the eradication of poverty at the top of the Irish and European agenda and to insist that the voice of people affected by poverty be heard in policy making.

We have done this through policy development, training, networking and support for members and through advocacy at Irish and European level.

This has not been an easy task for EAPN Ireland and our allies over the last year.

As our *Briefing on Poverty, 2015 and Proposals for 2016-2021* says:

“Poverty in Ireland is not new. Even during the years of economic boom before 2008, poverty levels in Ireland were higher than in many Western European countries. Since 2008, those already suffering from poverty, who have the least to give, have suffered most. Lone parents, unemployed, people with disabilities, Travellers and other ethnic minorities have been particularly hard hit.”

The European Anti Poverty Network was set up 26 years ago to provide a vehicle for members to understand and influence European policy and to network with our colleagues across Europe. While the focus of EAPN Ireland has widened to include Irish policy, there is a clear understanding that the future of Irish society is closely linked to the future of our European neighbours.

This became starkly apparent in the years after the 2008 economic crisis, which was turned into a social crisis by the decisions and priorities agreed between successive Irish Governments and the Troika, which included two European institutions, the European Commission and the European Central Bank.

While the last decade has seen gradual side-lining of commitment to the ‘Social Europe’, the issues have come home to roost in a particularly worrying way over the last year. The new Fiscal Treaty is being implemented with little regard for the impact on the income, services and employment which are needed for a decent life. The European Platform Against Poverty, announced with much fanfare in 2010 as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy, has almost sunk without trace. Many European governments seem to have been paralysed by fear of increasing racism to the extent that they have been unable to agree a humane and positive response to people seeking asylum or a better life, despite making specific commitments to this in international declarations. Most recently, our biggest neighbour, the UK, has voted to leave the EU in an atmosphere of fear and hate and similar emotions are being exploited across many other EU member states.

In looking towards the future, we need to consider the opportunities as well as these fears.

The ‘Briefing’ quoted above continues:

“Polls show that most people in Ireland want to live in a less divided society and want to see an end to poverty and its symptoms like homelessness and unemployment. This can be done if we invest in the policies and resources to build up services, guarantee income and promote quality jobs. Achieving this will not be easy, but we have never been better placed to end poverty.”

“The next five years will be crucial. As we rebuild from recession we face some fundamental choices: Do we want to rebuild a divided or integrated society? Can we tolerate persistent homelessness? Can we see another generation of children with wasted futures?”

Meeting this challenge will only be possible if we take the rhetoric of ‘leaving no one behind’ at the centre of political, economic and social thinking and really involving people who are currently marginalised in prioritising and planning for change. This phrase is central to the new Sustainable Development Goals for 2016 to 2030 negotiated, under the leadership of Ireland and Kenya, at the United Nations in 2015.

EAPN Ireland will play our part by insisting that Goal Number One, *Ending Poverty in all its forms* moves from a paper commitment to a reality. For this, we need to mobilise members and build strong alliances with a clear sense of purpose.

This report outlines our main areas of work over the last year. We look forward to feedback from members.

Anne Loftus,
Chairperson

Robin Hanan
Director
October 2016



The Norwegian delegation to the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty

1. Empowering members to influence policy

The central mission of EAPN Ireland is to put the fight against poverty at the top of the agenda at national and EU level and to bring the voice of people affected by poverty into the policy-making process.

This means empowering local and national members through policy formation, advocacy and monitoring and working with broad alliances in Ireland and across Europe.

European meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, 2015

EAPN Ireland again played an active role in this European meeting in 2015, which brought together activists with experience of poverty from all over Europe to discuss.

This year, the focus was on what we want from the European Pillar of Social Rights among themselves and with decision-makers.



The Social Inclusion Forum and preparatory meetings

EAPN Ireland and the Community Workers Co-operative (now Community Work Ireland) again worked with the Department of Social Protection to prepare for the annual Social Inclusion Forum (SIF). This is the main opportunity for anti-poverty groups and people affected by poverty to meet decision-makers to discuss all aspects of policy and its impact.

EAPN Ireland and CWC organised a series of workshops around the country to discuss poverty issues and prepare to take part in the Forum in 2015. Local organisations helped to host the meetings and make local contacts. Paul Ginnell facilitated regional workshops in Portlaoise (30 participants) and Drogheda (23 participants), as well as a ‘focus group’ for young people in Ballymun (13 participants). Ann Irwin and Rachel Doyle of the CWC ran workshops in Galway and Enniscorthy and a focus group for migrants and asylum seekers in Dublin.

23 participants drawn from these regional meetings attended the national preparatory meeting in Dublin on 24 March. This meeting discussed feedback from the local meetings and how to bring these messages to the Government Forum. A short report from the local meetings highlighting the issues and proposals of participants regarding poverty and social exclusion was presented at the SIF.

Robin Hanan, together with film maker Emer Cooney, interviewed a number of participants at the regional meetings and created a video about the experiences and hopes of participants which was shown at the Social Inclusion Forum and at the Government High Level Committee on Social Policy and .distributed widely in social media.

MAKING SPACE: Workshops for Community Activists

In June 2015, EAPN Ireland and Community Action Network (CAN) organised workshops in Ennis, Longford, Cork or Dublin to provide space to reflect on our passion for social justice, how we might connect more deeply with it and direct it more effectively.

A follow-up workshop was organised in Ennis in February 2016.

Process

Through Photolanguage, participants were asked to choose a card that spoke to them about what had brought them into social justice work. Following this they worked in small groups to share stories and make a composite photo poster. In small groups they were then asked to *name what supported them in the work over the years and to identify anything that is currently blocking them in their work.*

When the small groups had completed their conversation and made posters illustrating their experience they came together to have a further conversation on anything that they noticed or anything they wanted to develop further.

There followed a case study in community work demonstrated by the Dolphin House Human Rights project. This was accompanied by a framework for change, devised by CAN as a means of making sense of how change can be realised.

Participants were asked to discuss this as a framework for change from the perspective of their own work. In a closing round participants were asked to consider “*what needs to happen to help sustain change today?*”

Policy papers, statements and submissions on www.eapn.ie from EAPN Ireland, and alliances for which we provide the secretariat

- Submission to Budget 2017, *August 2016*
- Submission to National Reform Programme 2016, *April 2016*
- Better Europe Alliance Response to EC Country Report 2016, *April 2016*
- Four Tests for the next Government, Community Platform, *February 2016*,
- Briefing on poverty, 2015 and proposals for 2016-2021, *December 2015*
- Response to CSO poverty figures issued today *November 2015*
- Better Europe Alliance press release in advance of meeting with Oireachtas Committee on EU Affairs, *October 2015*
- Community Platform Four Tests for Budget 2016, *October 2015*
- Briefing on Poverty Targets, European Semester and Europe 2020, *September 2015*
- Response to 2015 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland, *September 2015*
- Position Paper on Positive Activation, *July 2015*
- Community Platform Press release and publication “Widening inequality hitting most vulnerable”, *July 2015*
- Budget 2016 – “unless we prioritise vital, well targeted spending over tax cuts, the misery for many will continue.”, *June 2015*
- Press release on new Commission recommendations, *May 2015*
- Anti Poverty Network welcomes Oireachtas Committee Report declaring Direct Provision for Asylum Seekers “not fit for purpose”, *May 2015*
- Submission on the Draft Framework Policy for Local and Community Development, *April 2015*
- Submission to Irish National Reform Programme 2015, *April 2015*
- Press Release “Poverty figures show need for 5 year plan against poverty”, *January 2015*

2. Policy development and advocacy

The EAPN Ireland Policy Group

This group leads policy development, especially in relation to Ireland's links with the *Europe 2020 strategy* and the *European Semester*. During the year, it changed its name from the Europe 2020 Policy Group to reflect its broader remit. It is chaired by Brid O'Brien of the INOU and is made up of representatives of: Age Action Ireland; Congress Centres Network; Disability Federation of Ireland; EAPN Ireland; Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed; Irish Traveller Movement; Migrant Rights Centre Ireland; National Adult Literacy Agency; National Youth Council of Ireland; National Women's Council of Ireland; One Family; Simon Communities of Ireland; SIPTU.

Policy work is facilitated within the staff by Paul Ginnell, who develops policy papers, supports advocacy and builds alliances for change. Paul is also the Irish representative on the EU Inclusion Strategies Group of EAPN Europe, which he co-chairs.

Active inclusion or 'activation'?

The Policy Group has played an important part in coordinating inputs to policy on welfare and training as well as promoting 'active inclusion'.

During 2015, the group developed a position paper on "Positive Activation" as part of efforts to inform the development of the Pathways to Work strategy, 2016-2020. They also made a submission to Pathways to Work based on it.

The group also met with the Low Pay Commission on 5th November to present the Working Group's input.



Above & below. from Position Paper on Positive Activation

Key principles for the implementation of an active inclusion approach to activation

- Supports for those excluded from employment work from strong principles of equality, human rights and social inclusion.
- The supports of the public employment service must be holistic and provided within an active inclusion approach. It must also provide for ensuring access to an adequate income, to quality services and ensuring that the labour market is inclusive.
- The public employment service must work from a positive, person centred approach which provides people with positive choices for improving their lives.
- Staff working within the public employment service and in education and training must be upskilled to be able to provide those accessing the services with a high quality of support and information.

Letter published in the Irish Times after the 2016 election

“In forming a government, unlike *Lanigan’s Ball*, it is less important who is stepping in and out again and more important what policies they agree on.

“All of the parties to the current dance have explained, during the election, that their priority is to “protect the most vulnerable”, but now we need to turn this into detailed multi-annual policies to reduce poverty.

“The first step is to recognise the shocking scale of the problem. The CSO has found that, between 2008 and 2013, the proportion of our people experiencing “deprivation” nearly trebled to 29 per cent. This means being unable to afford two from a list of items like heating your home or eating a substantial meal every second day, a very basic measure in the 21st century. More than a third of children and one in five of people at work were classified as experiencing deprivation, while the picture is worse for groups like Travellers, lone parents, the long-term unemployed and the homeless.

“For decades we have danced around in the same pattern. In boom times, people in poverty are left behind, while in more austere times the same groups suffer the most.

“Breaking this cycle will need a long-term commitment to policies and investments to provide adequate income, quality work and services, funded by sufficient and fair taxation.

“There has been plenty of research and experience to show what makes the difference between a country with high and low levels of poverty. Nearly 20 years ago, the all-party National Anti Poverty Strategy pointed to most of the instruments needed.

“However, strategies alone don’t change the world; we need solid commitments in the programme for government to end the dance of poverty and despair”

Anne Loftus, Chairperson

Robin Hanan, Director,

EAPN (European Anti Poverty Network) Ireland

3. Working for an Irish all-government strategy against poverty

Briefing on poverty, 2015 and proposals for 2016-2021

This paper, published in December 2015, outlines in some detail the extent of poverty in Ireland and the challenges faced by the next Government.

Section 5 urges

“...all parties and candidates for the next Dáil to commit to a new five year strategy against poverty and social exclusion covering the term of the next Dáil, to replace the current National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2007-2016).”

This section outlines the need for:

- A comprehensive strategy
- A strategy for a decent income
- A strategy for quality jobs
- A strategy for quality services:
- A strategy to end homelessness and ensure housing for all
- A strategy based on human rights, dignity and equality
- A strategy which we can afford *“... a five-year plan to bring overall Irish taxation levels from their current 30% of GDP to the EU average, which is currently 40% of GDP.”*

European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland
Briefing on poverty, 2015
and proposals for 2016-2021



This paper is produced by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland. It gives an overview of poverty in Ireland today and makes proposals to political parties who wish to make a serious impact on poverty during the term of the next Dáil.

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“Poverty is not an accident. Like slavery and apartheid, it is man made and can be removed by the actions of human beings.”

Nelson Mandela

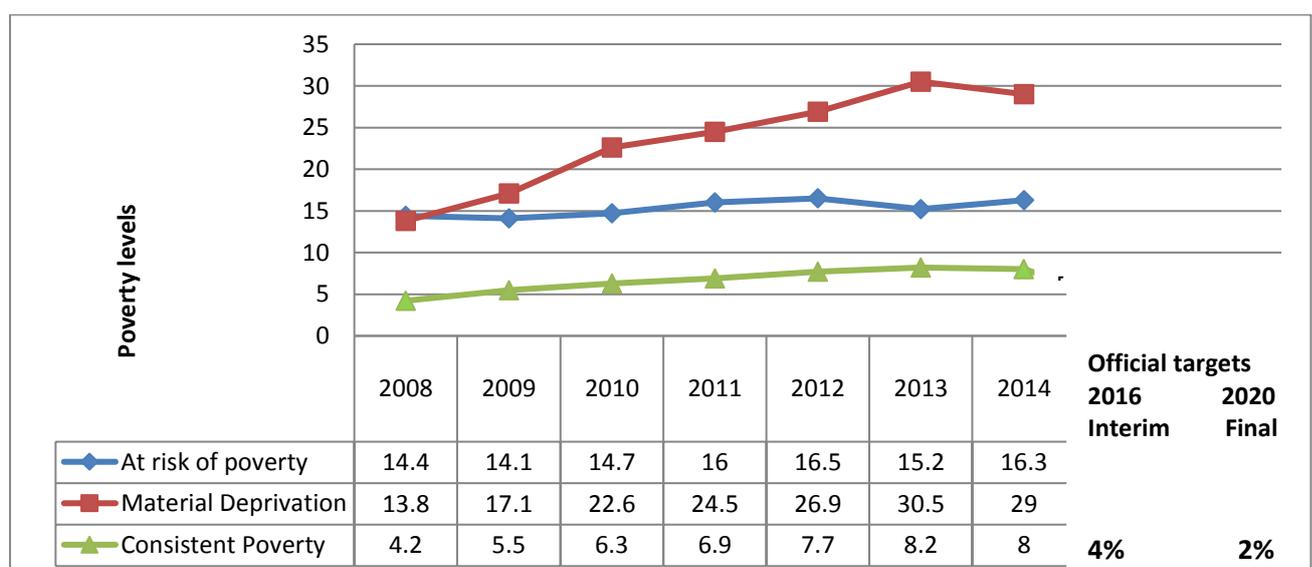
01

Introduction

Poverty in Ireland is not new. Even during the years of economic boom before 2008, poverty levels in Ireland were higher than in many Western European countries. Since 2008, those already suffering from poverty, who have the least to give, have suffered most. Lone parents, unemployed, people with disabilities, Travellers and other ethnic minorities have been particularly hard hit.

Polls show that most people in Ireland want to live in a less divided society and want to see an end to poverty and its symptoms like homelessness and unemployment. This can be done if we invest in the policies and resources to build up services, guarantee income and promote quality jobs. Achieving this will not be easy, but we have never been better placed to end poverty.

The next five years will be crucial. As we rebuild from recession we face some fundamental choices: Do we want to rebuild a divided or integrated society? Can we tolerate persistent homelessness? Can we see another generation of children with wasted futures? This paper explores the reality of poverty in Ireland today and proposes policies for the five-year term of the next Dáil.



From Briefing on poverty, 2015 and proposals for 2016-2021

Election 2016 and the new Government

During the 2016 election campaign and its aftermath, EAPN Ireland concentrated on promoting the importance of an all-party commitment to this medium term strategy to end poverty. A summary of these proposals was given to the political parties, as their manifestoes were developed, distributed to all candidates when they were announced and discussed with the main political parties drawing up the new Programme for Government.

During the election a series of 11 blogs encouraged members to discuss these issues with canvassers and candidates and provided a guide to the election for member organisations. All party leaders were asked to give their responses to the EAPN Ireland paper.

The new Programme for Government includes a commitment to:

... pursue an integrated plan across Government Departments to reduce poverty, disadvantage and inequality, by enabling individuals in jobless households back into the workforce, by breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and by ensuring that our educational programmes at every level offer excellence in outcomes for all.

Budget 2016

EAPN Ireland's pre-budget submission was used as part of the preparatory material for the Tánaiste's Pre-Budget Forum. Our section on impact assessment and 'proofing;' was discussed in some detail in one of the workshops and, informally, with DSP officials, the Tánaiste and her economic advisor. We also put out a Press Release following the Budget which was picked up by RTE and the newspapers.

EAPN Ireland also coordinated the production and distribution of a new version of the Community Platform's 'Four Tests for Budget 2016' which has provided a useful point of reference (and quotes) for politicians, journalists and policy workers. The press release just before the Budget led to two radio interviews.

Community Platform's Four Tests for Budget 2016 (in summary)

1. Will Budget 2016 redistribute income towards the poorest 20% of the population and compensate those who have lost most over the last seven years?
2. Will Budget 2016 strengthen access to quality employment?
3. Will Budget 2016 provide the funding needed to restore and strengthen services which are of particular importance to people on low income?
4. Will Budget 2016 put in place mechanisms to ensure that all areas of policy, including the budget itself, work to reduce poverty and inequality?

4. Fighting Irish poverty in a European context

Influencing the European Platform Against Poverty, the broader economic, social and environmental strategies' of Europe 2020 and the European Semester and their implementation in Ireland is central to EAPN Ireland's work.

The EAPN Ireland Policy Group, described above, has a special focus on these strategies and on new and emerging proposals such as the European Pillar of Social Rights.

During the year, EAPN Ireland made submissions at each stage of the process and responded and discussed with Irish officials where possible the Irish responses. They also made inputs to Europe-wide assessments through the EAPN Europe EU Inclusion Strategies Group (EUISG) which is co-chaired by Paul Ginnell.

These include:

- The National Reform Programme
- The European Commission's Country Specific Recommendations

A briefing on understanding the Semester and how to engage with it was produced and distributed widely.

Better Europe Alliance

EAPN Ireland continued to convene the Better Europe Alliance, which brings together social and environmental NGOs and trade unions to monitor and influence the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European policy semester.

The Alliance is made up of ten organisations: Age and Opportunity; Disability Federation of Ireland; Environmental Pillar; EAPN Ireland; Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed; National Adult Literacy Agency; National Association of Building Cooperatives; National Women's Council of Ireland; SIPTU; Social Justice Ireland.

They liaised with the main bodies responsible for the European Semester in Ireland, the Department of the Taoiseach and the Semester Officers of the European Commission Representation in Ireland.

The Alliance made submissions to the major stages of the Semester process. Members met with the European Commission's Fact-finding Mission to Ireland on the 26th November. It also met with the Oireachtas Committee on EU Affairs.



The EU Annual Convention on Inclusive Growth Brussels



Paul Ginnell making a presentation at the EU Convention on Inclusive Growth

Paul Ginnell represented EAPN Ireland at the Convention in March 2016 as a member of the Irish Government’s delegation. The Convention was previously called the Annual Convention on the Platform Against Poverty. The failure to make progress towards agreed targets to reduce poverty was again highlighted. The EU strategies are placing more and more emphasis on ‘getting people into jobs’, rather than thinking about the quality of those jobs or the services and income supports which make a more inclusive society possible.

The Convention was used as an opportunity for the European Commission to present its new consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights. Paul made a presentation in the workshop on the European Semester.

Financial Transaction Tax:

EAPN Ireland is part of a coalition of social, environmental and development NGOs working for the introduction of a Financial Transaction Tax.

During 2015, we highlighted the fact that most of the Eurozone, along with a number of other European states, are edging towards agreeing an FTT, but Ireland has opted out.

Launch of the Irish campaign for a Financial Transaction tax (“Robin Hood Tax”)



5. Information is power

Information flow is crucial to influencing policy.

EAPN Ireland Newsflash continued to be distributed to about 1,500 addresses (members, other community groups, politicians, officials, journalists etc.) Other mailings to members highlight particular issues and campaigns

Some issues taken up in special Newsflash briefings include:

- The new Global Goals. for 2030
- The refugee and racism crisis.
- Issues in the 2016 election
- Understanding the European semester

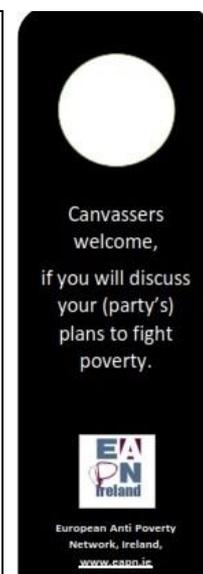
EAPN Ireland continued to disseminate information through social media, especially Facebook and Twitter. Issues prioritised include:

- EAPN (Ireland and EU), Community Platform and other members' and allies' press releases and statements
- Responding to particular issues as they arise, such as the commemoration of the victims of the recent Carrickmines tragedy and the campaigns for change
- Discussion and national and international examples of the effects of policies in areas like welfare, work, services, homelessness etc. and particular moments such as the Budget.
- Information, understanding and practical mobilisation around the refugee crisis
- Promoting understanding and campaigns on issues such as the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), Financial Transaction Tax.

In addition to the blogs on the election, a number of blogs on community development and policy issues were posted and distributed through social media.

Election Blogs

1. Intro: Poverty in the election
2. Community Platform's Four Tests for the Next Government
3. Links to issues pages from other organisations
4. Income and welfare
5. Guest blog: Lucinda Creighton, TD, Renua
6. Guest Blog: Gerry Adams TD, Sinn Fein
7. 'Living wage'
8. Ending homelessness
9. Guest Blog – an Tánaiste Joan Burton, TD, Labour
10. Time to vote. Time to end poverty for good.
11. A summary of how the parties did and their promises



6. Networking in Ireland – the Community Platform

EAPN Ireland continued to act as Secretariat for the Community Platform, an alliance of 29 national organisations working for social inclusion and equality.

The year started with the launch of an important policy paper and infographic on poverty and inequality in Ireland called '**Future Perspectives**'. This was widely covered in the media.

Before the Budget, the Platform issued a joint paper called 'four tests for Budget 2015' and followed this up with a press statement reacting to the Budget. Both were widely quoted in the Dáil and Seanad and in the media.

Grassroots activism for change



With the support of an Advocacy initiative 'legacy grant', the Platform ran a conference on 'grassroots activism for change', with workshop examples from grass roots campaigns in Catalonia; from LGBT Noise; from Dolphin's House; from anti-fracking campaigns in Leitrim and from the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland. 70 people attended.

Bilateral Meetings with Government Departments

The Platform continued to provide the link between member groups and the bilateral meetings between the Community and Voluntary Pillar and Government Departments. These included the Departments of Social Protection; Environment, Community and Local Government (Community and Housing Sections); Jobs Enterprise and Innovation; Education and Skills; Finance; and Public Expenditure and Reform. There was a Pre-Budget meeting with the Ministers for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. Paul Ginnell also attended the National Economic Dialogue on 16-17 July 2015 on behalf of the Community Platform

We are also members of...

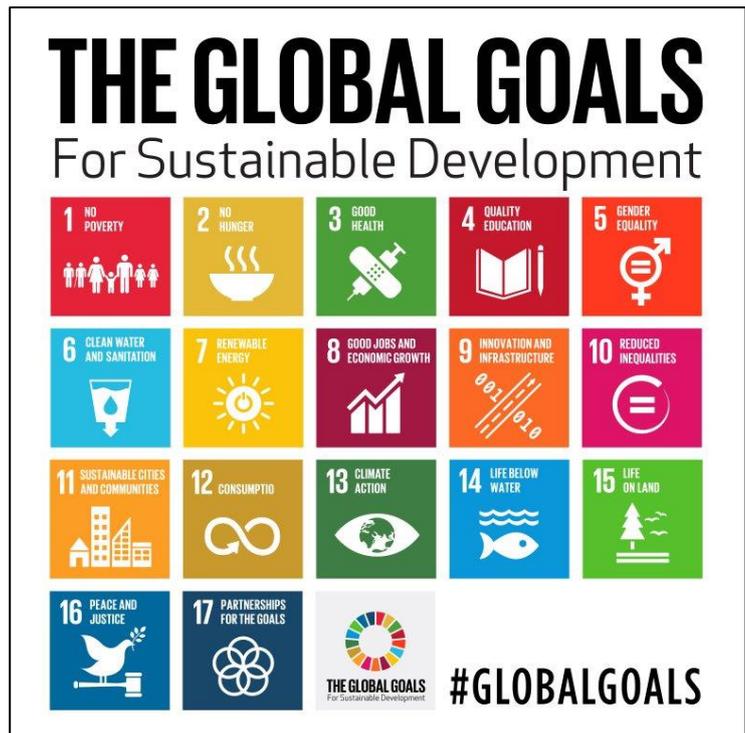
Academics Stand Against Poverty, a new group linking academics and activists, the alliance for **Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** and the **Equality and Rights Alliance**.

7. Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

EAPN Ireland has played an active part in promoting the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, 2016-2030.

Robin Hanan acted as spokesperson for the group, led by ATD, which organised the event 'Ireland Lights the Way' on the Millennium Bridge to mark the adoption of the goals, and read the message of support from President Michael D Higgins.

We have also been active in the alliance to work for an effective action plan in Ireland to implement the Global Goals



SWSD 2018

EAPN Ireland has also joined the local organising group for the World Conference on Social Work and Social Development to be held in Ireland in 2018.

This is to be jointly hosted by EAPN Ireland, the Irish Association of Social Workers and the Social Policy and Social Work Departments of TCD, UCD and NUIG, on behalf of three world federations.



Workshop on the Global Goals

8. EAPN (Europe)

We continued to play an active role in the Europe-wide EAPN Network.

Management and capacity BUILDING

Tess Murphy continued as the Irish representative on the EAPN Europe Executive Committee (ExCo). As well as taking part in the overall management of the network, Tess took an active role in developing the new membership support system for national networks.

Policy development and the EU Inclusion Strategies Group

Paul Ginnell continued to co-chair the EAPN Europe Policy Group dealing with social inclusion, playing an active role in producing analysis and submissions.

During the period this group continued to work to change the direction of EU policy where over 122 million people are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The group sought to bring about a more social focus to the European Semester process and a greater commitment to the poverty reduction target in the Europe 2020 Strategy. In particular there was engagement with the Country Specific Recommendation and the National Reform Programmes, including a policy conference in October 2015 in which Paul Ginnell presented EAPN's analysis of the National Reform Programmes and proposals for the future. The policy group also coordinated Task Forces on the European Social Fund and on Social Innovation and an EU wide Living Wage Campaign.



9. Developing the Network



Board and staff, 2015-2016 (Left to Right):

(Inset) Pat Doyle (Peter McVerry Trust); Michael Mackey (Galway Simon Communities); Farai Calvin Jeyacheya (Zimbabwe Heritage Trust); Aiden Lloyd (South Dublin); Joan O'Donnell (Disability Federation of Ireland); Maureen Gondipon, Admin and Finance Officer; Maureen Ward (Offaly Travellers Movement, Treasurer); Anne Loftus (Clare, Chairperson); Lorraine Mulligan (SIPTU, Vice Chair); Paul Ginnell (Policy Officer); Tess Murphy (Longford Women's Link, rep on EAPN Europe Executive); (inset) Philip O'Connor (Dublin) and Robin Hanan (Director).

Sheila Simmons (Irish Association of Older People) retired at the 2015 AGM.

The Board had two planning sessions during the year in addition to regular oversight of the work of the Network.

AGM 2015



The AGM was held in Dublin in June. There was a short seminar on Economic and Social Rights, with strong inputs from Aiden Lloyd (Board member), Mike Allen (Focus Ireland) and Eamon Tansey (FLAC)

Finances

EAPN Ireland succeeded in obtaining two years' funding from the Scheme to Support National Organisations administered by Pobal. We had funding from two European projects, our European network and the Department of Social Protection.



Maureen Gondipon at the AGM



100 King Street North, Dublin 7

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 works for progressive social change across Europe.

EAPN Ireland is made up of over two hundred local, regional and national anti-poverty organisations and individuals. EAPN Ireland supports members to influence national and European policy through training, information, collective action and networking.

For further information and to join, see

www.eapn.ie

(website currently being redesigned)

