



European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland

Annual Report 2019

Introduction

This is the annual report for 2019. While there have been so many significant events in 2020 which have overshadowed those of last year, it is important to reflect on 2019.

In 2019 the EU elected a new European Parliament and a new leadership across the EU institutions. In the run up to the elections EAPN Ireland ran a number of citizens dialogue meetings to engage people in reflecting on the role of the EU in creating a more equal society, highlighting the importance of the need for the EU to better deliver on its Treaty values of respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy and equality. The EAPN Ireland manifesto for the Parliament elections reinforced this message, calling for the EU to deliver on its commitments, with concrete proposals for the next five years.

The new European Commission published its policy priorities for its five-year term, including a commitment to do more to fight poverty and implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. With the outbreak of Covid-19 and the economic crisis that has followed, the importance of delivering on these commitments has become even more crucial and will be severely tested.

The crisis of over ten years ago highlighted the lack of commitment to social values, with austerity policy at EU and national level contributing to many more people falling deeper into poverty. Even before we entered this new crisis there were more people in Ireland than before 2008 and Ireland and the EU looked likely to fail to meet their 2020 poverty reduction targets. Many groups in society were being left behind and an unacceptable number of people were dependant on charities for food and other essential items for their survival.

As Ireland, the EU and wider global communities recover from the impact of Covid-19, it is crucial that lessons are learnt from the last crisis and we build back better than we were before. The same policies will not work. The new Irish Government and the EU must take the opportunity to build a recovery that works for people and planet and leaves no-one behind.

EAPN Ireland will continue to build on the work it did in 2019 on access to an adequate income for all, on health inequality and on access to decent jobs. It will continue to push for the implementation of an integrated approach to addressing the causes and consequences of poverty, and for this to be part of a wider strategy to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

2020 has also brought into stark focus the reality of racism and discrimination and its destructive impact on people and society. Ending all forms of discrimination has to be an essential part of achieving an inclusive society free of poverty and EAPN Ireland will work with others achieve this. We have been active in lobbying for the recognition of socio-economic status as a ground for discrimination in Irish law and will continue this work until it is achieved.

The participation of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their organisations in the process of change is crucial. Supporting this participation is an important part of the work of EAPN Ireland, including lobbying for the resourcing of autonomous Community Development organisations, an issue we addressed in our AGM in 2019.

EAPN Ireland is very aware that if we want to achieve sustainable change we need to work together with our allies both in Ireland and across Europe. Particularly important for us is our active membership of EAPN (Europe) through which we work with our colleagues across Europe to bring about an end to poverty and its destructive impact on people, communities and societies.

1. Campaigns, Advocacy and Empowerment

Citizen Dialogues: The role of the EU in supporting a more equal society

In March EAPN Ireland hosted three Citizen Dialogues entitled *Have your Say! - What is the role of the EU in supporting a more equal society?* The events, which were supported by the European Commission, took place in Cork, Galway and Dublin attracted over 70 participants who engaged in energetic debate. The debate was stimulated by inputs from Hugh Frazer, Adjunct Professor from Maynooth University, Rosella Chiodo from the European Commission and Paul Ginnell the Director of EAPN Ireland.



The inputs were followed by table discussions with concluding responses from a different panel at each event involving representatives of various community organisations, the European Commission and the ESRI.

The importance of delivering on EU Treaty values and social rights were recurring themes throughout the workshops. Other important issues discussed were public services, climate change, adequate taxation and the linked issue of tax justice, fighting populism, the failure to implement positive policies, and how the EU can better communicate the policy it is seeking to progress.



European Elections and Leadership

In May 2019 the European Elections took place in the 28 European Union member states to elect the 751 new Members of the European Parliament (reducing to 705 members following Brexit in 2020). This included the election of 13 Irish MEPs. The EAPN Ireland manifesto for the elections reflected the discussion and priorities highlighted during the Citizen Dialogues held earlier in 2019. Entitled 'Delivering on EU Values to End Poverty' it focused on the role of the European Parliament in



delivering on EU Treaty values of respect for human dignity and human rights, equality and solidarity and on specific commitments the EU has already signed up to on poverty reduction, social rights, and balanced, inclusive and sustainable development.

Alongside its Manifesto EAPN Ireland also circulated a guide to using it to engage with candidates during the election campaign and afterwards produced a Briefing on the outcome of the elections to the Parliament and wider changes to the other EU institutions including the European Commission and European Council.

In advance of the elections to the European Parliament there was a fear that the new Parliament would see a large increase in representation of Eurosceptic and far-right populist MEPs. While there was some increase, it was not as large as expected and this representation has reduced following the exit of the UK from the EU in January 2020.

Campaign for the benchmarking of social welfare

EAPN Ireland continued its campaign for social welfare levels to be set at a level that is adequate for people to live with dignity. This campaign is carried alongside other organisations with a similar goal with EAPN Ireland coordinating joint action. Adequacy of income is very much linked to the cost of living, which is rising in Ireland, particularly linked to the cost of services such as housing and childcare. The main demand from the campaign is for social welfare to be set at a level which is adequate to lift people above the poverty line and meet a Minimum Essential Standard of Living, as developed by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice.

The campaign built on the success of 2018 when the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Act 2018 included a commitment from the Government to consult on the benchmarking of social welfare in early 2019. Based on this commitment the members of the campaign engaged with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) consultation on benchmarking of social welfare. EAPN Ireland and its allies also focused on benchmarking against a level that is adequate in their Budget 2020 submissions. As in the previous year this was one of the key issues discussed at the DEASP Pre-Budget Forum in July 2019. At the Forum Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection publicly agreed that Minimum Essential Standard of Living provided the best basis for benchmarking social welfare. Following the Forum EAPN Ireland published an Opinion Piece in the Irish Examiner supporting the Minister and members of the campaign carried out a briefing for media and Oireachtas members in advance of Budget day. However, no progress was made on benchmarking in Budget 2020. EAPN Ireland and other organisations will continue to work on this as a priority in 2020. This is critical if those depending on social welfare are to have an adequate income to live in dignity.



Pre-Budget political and media briefing on benchmarking social welfare rates

An effective anti-poverty strategy for Ireland

The Programme for Government on 2016 made a commitment to a new anti-poverty strategy and consultation on this strategy began in 2017. During 2019 EAPN Ireland continued to call for its publication and to use the delay to try to influence its content. The key opportunity for this was the Social Inclusion Forum which took place in May.

The new Roadmap for Social Inclusion was finally published the day before a General election was called in January 2020.

• Social Inclusion Forum 2019

The Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) is organised annually with the aim of bringing different stakeholders together, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, to support the monitoring of Ireland's social inclusion strategy. The 2019 Social Inclusion Forum took place on the 22nd May in the Aviva Stadium in Dublin under the theme 'Collaborative Working at Local and National Level'.



Above: Participants attending Social Inclusion Forum Pre-meeting in Tralee

As in previous years EAPN Ireland teamed up with Community Work Ireland (CWI) to organise local preparatory meetings. One hundred and twenty-seven people attended the six local meetings which took place in counties Waterford, Kerry, Louth, Roscommon and Dublin and a focus groups with community workers was also held.



Above: Paul Ginnell presenting feedback from local meetings at the Forum on 22nd May

EAPN Ireland and CWI also supported a group of participants from the local meetings to attend the Forum and participate directly in presenting the report from the local preparatory meetings in the presence of the Minister for Social Protection, Regina Doherty. The report from the workshops highlighted the broad range of issues that were raised across many areas but in particular the importance of the Government putting in place and implementing the policies needed to address poverty in all its dimensions.

Progressing Economic Social and Cultural Rights

- **Recognition of Socio-economic Status as a Ground for Discrimination**

Following a commitment at the AGM in 2018 EAPN Ireland has continued to work with other organisations to push for the introduction of socio-economic status as a ground for discrimination in Irish legislation. As it stands, Ireland's equality legislation does not recognise or protect those who are discriminated against because they are from a disadvantaged community, living on a low income etc. This is an unacceptable omission from Irish law.

In June 2017 a Private Members Bill to legislate for the inclusion of disadvantaged socio-economic status in legislation was introduced to the Oireachtas. However, in late 2017 its progress was temporarily halted by the Government while further research was carried out on defining socio-economic status and the cost of implementing it. While this research has continued, the Bill itself lapsed in early 2020 with the dissolution of the Dáil and Seanad.

In October Paul Ginnell chaired an event organised by All Together in Dignity (ATD) Ireland linked to the launch of their report "Does It Only Happen to Me? Living in the shadows of Socio-Economic Discrimination".

EAPN Ireland will continue to work with other organisations to lobby for the recognition of socio-economic status as a ground for discrimination in Irish legislation.

- **European Pillar of Social Rights**



In 2017 the European Pillar of Social Rights was agreed by all EU leaders, including the Taoiseach. It includes 20 right and principles in the areas of employment and social rights that have to be implemented by all EU Member States. Since 2017 EAPN Ireland and the European network have pushed for its implementation.

To mark the 2nd anniversary of the proclamation of the Pillar of Social Rights in November 2019 EAPN Ireland launched a new video entitled 'Know your Rights – The European Pillar of Social Rights'. The short video was funded by the Communicating Europe Initiative in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. EAPN Ireland has also been working to support the implementation of the Pillar through the European Semester process and through its work on access to an adequate social welfare.

- **Housing and Homelessness**

With little progress being made to address the issue of housing and homelessness, these have continued to be a major issue. Alongside advocating for change through its policy work during 2019, EAPN Ireland also participated in events organised by the Raise the Roof campaign to advocate for and demand immediate and effective action.



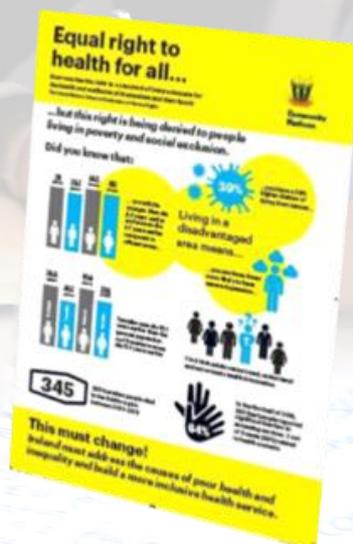
One of a number of protests organised by Raise the Roof during 2019

Health inequality

In 2019 EAPN Ireland was successful in getting funding from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission for a project called *A community approach to addressing health inequalities and strengthening the Right to Health*. The project builds on work done by the Community Platform on the equal right to health for all with the aim of improving how the main national health strategies address health inequality.

Work started in 2019 and involved carrying out six community conversations. These took place in Longford Town, Tallaght and the North Inner City in Dublin, Knocknaheeny in Cork City, Donegal Town and in the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland.

Over 50 participants took part in the community conversations and the issues and experiences were wide ranging. They included proposals for addressing health inequalities and improving health outcomes for people and communities. The next stage of the project is a roundtable event in April 2020 to discuss the issues and proposals with community representative and officials working to implement national health strategies such as Sláintecare, Healthy Ireland and on mental health in April 2020.

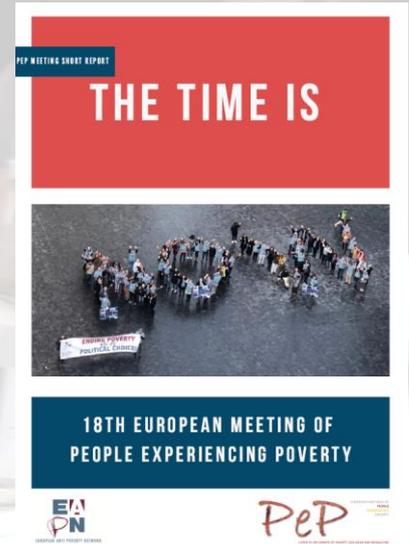


Strong autonomous community organisations

For over ten years EAPN Ireland has consistently highlighted the negative impact brought by the cutting of supports and programmes for strong and autonomous community development organisations and called for these to be reversed. The workshop held at the AGM in June brought together a range of speakers and experience to discuss this issue. The workshop entitled “Responding effectively to poverty in an utterly changed landscape” made it clear that the lack of a strong community development organisations and supports is deeply damaging to community resilience and to people being able to have an effective voice to improving the lives of people in their communities. The inputs were from Brian Harvey, North Clondalkin CDP, Community Work Ireland and the SIPTU Community Sector organiser. Later in the summer the Department of Rural and Community Development published *A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland* which included a commitment to autonomous community development. This commitment now needs to be resourced and implemented.

Giving voice to People Experiencing Poverty in the EU

The theme for the 2019 EU Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty was 'The Time is NOW'. The Meeting in Brussels in November was attended by almost 150 participants from 32 countries and focused on a number of key issues for those experiencing poverty. These issues included housing, adequate welfare supports, health, jobs and participation. The Irish delegates included Alice Kelly from Glenshane Women's Group and Paul Uzell from All Together in Dignity Ireland. The third delegate was Alphonse Basogomba from Irish Development Education Centre who did all the preparation with the group but whose attendance was again frustrated, this time due to visa delays. Aiden Lloyd, a Board member of EAPN Ireland, is the Irish coordinator for the EU Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty.



Left: Paul Uzell, one of the Irish delegates at the EU Meeting.



Right: Alice Kelly who participated in the opening panel at the Meeting being interviewed by Euronews

Engaging with European policy

Commitments at European level to reduce or end poverty have changed over the years. Since 2010 the EU has had a commitment to reduce the number of people at-risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU by 20 million (to 96 million) people by 2020. This commitment is part of the Europe 2020 Strategy which later became part of the European Semester process that was put in place to monitor the economic situation in EU countries, but was then expanded to include social and environmental monitoring. In 2018 the European Semester began to report on the implementation on the European Pillar of Social Rights. However, progress has been difficult and in 2018 there were still almost 110 million people in poverty and social exclusion in the EU including almost 280,000 people in consistent poverty in Ireland.

EAPN Ireland, as part of the wider network across Europe, engages in a detailed way with EU policy, and advocates tirelessly at EU and national level for delivery on existing commitments, and beyond.

In 2019 EAPN Ireland made its annual submission to the Irish National Reform Programme (NRP) and contributed to EAPN (Europe) analysis and policy on the European Semester and other policy developments. EAPN Ireland also continues to coordinate Better Europe Alliance, a cross-sectoral grouping of civil society organisations in Ireland working for progress on social and sustainable goals through the European Semester and the Europe 2020 strategy.

Summary of Publications and Submissions in 2019

- [Submission to the DEASP Review of the Implementation of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017](#), *January 2019*
- [Submission to DEASP on the revised Control and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2019-2023](#), *February 2019*
- [Report from Citizen Dialogue Workshops on 'The role of the EU in supporting a more equal society'](#), *March 2019*
- [European Election Manifesto 2019](#), and [Guide for engaging with candidates](#), *April 2019*
- [Better Europe Alliance response to European Commission 2019 Report on Ireland](#), *April 2019*
- [Submission to National Reform Programme 2019](#), *April 2019*
- [Summary of Regional Workshops for 2019 Social Inclusion Forum](#), *May 2019*
- [Submission to DEASP on benchmarking social welfare rates](#), *May 2019*
- [Pre-Budget Submission 2020](#) and [Press Statement in response to its publication](#) *June and October 2019*
- [Submission to Pathways to Work Strategy 2020-2024](#), *September 2019*
- ["Know Your Rights: The European Pillar of Social Rights" Video](#), *November 2019*
- [Briefing note on CSO Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2018](#), *December 2019*
- [Statement on the Publication of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025](#), *January 2020*

2. Working Effectively Through Networks

EAPN Ireland recognises the importance of working closely with other organisations and networks at national and EU levels in order to achieve our common goal of an inclusive, just and sustainable future for all. Over time we have built up our work for collective change and take a leadership role in coordinating some of these.

EAPN (Europe)

Since its foundation in 1990 EAPN Ireland has been an active member of the European network of EAPN and this continued in 2019. EAPN (Europe) currently has a membership of 32 national networks and 17 European organisations. The European network plays a crucial role at EU level in mobilising those experiencing poverty, their organisations and policy makers in the fight against poverty.

In 2018 Joan O'Donnell took over from Tess Murphy in representing EAPN Ireland on the EAPN (Europe) Executive Committee (Board) before being replaced by Anne Loftus in September 2019. Paul Ginnell continued to represent EAPN Ireland on the European network's policy group (EU Inclusion Strategies Group).

In September 2019, Anne, Paul and EAPN Ireland Policy and Communications Officer Irene Byrne represented EAPN Ireland at the European Network's General Assembly (AGM) in Helsinki, Finland. The General Assembly involved a Conference on the Role of Power, Politics and Participation in Eradicating Poverty in Europe.

Community Platform



COMMUNITY PLATFORM
CHALLENGING POVERTY & INEQUALITY

Since 2012 EAPN Ireland has supported the coordination of the Community Platform and continued to do so in 2019.

During 2019 the main activity for the Platform was their engagement with the Local and European Election in May. The Community Platform worked with Values Lab to develop a manifesto focused on engagement with positive social values of Community, Decency and Participation. The Platform Manifestos for both the Local and the European Elections were launched by former MEP Marian Harkin and disseminated to all political parties and candidates for the European Elections. In order to get wider public engagement with the manifestos and the values they were widely circulated with a public flyer to the public through the community and voluntary sectors organisations and social media.



The Platform also continued its annual engagement with the annual Budget process and in September published its Four Tests for Budget 2020. The Four Tests are:

- Will Budget 2020 redistribute income towards the poorest 20%?
- Will Budget 2020 strengthen access to quality employment?
- Will Budget 2020 restore and strengthen public services which are of particular importance to people on low income?
- Will the impact of Budget 2020 be assessed to ensure that all provisions reduce poverty and inequality?

Through the Community and Voluntary Pillar, the Community Platform also participated in a number of bilateral meetings with different Government Departments. Further information at www.communityplatform.ie

Better Europe Alliance

In 2014 EAPN Ireland brought together, and continues to support, the Better Europe Alliance of Irish Civil Society Organisations working for a Social and Sustainable Europe. The members of the Alliance are: Age and Opportunity; Cooperative Housing Ireland; Disability Federation of Ireland; Environmental Pillar; EAPN Ireland; Irish Rural Link; Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed; National Adult Literacy Agency; National Women's Council of Ireland; SIPTU; Society of St Vincent de Paul and Social Justice Ireland. During 2019 the Alliance published its response to the European Commission's 2019 Country Report for Ireland, which it circulated widely. Alliance members also met with the European Semester Officer in the European Commission office in Dublin to present the report and in October met with the European Commission fact-finding mission from Brussels to present its analysis of social, economic and environmental issues related to the European Semester process and the Europe 2020 strategy.

Coalition 2030



EAPN Ireland is a member of the Irish Coalition of civil society organisations which has come together to ensure that the Irish Government is effectively implementing policies to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Coalition has ongoing engagement with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment which has responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the SDGs in Ireland. In May the Coalition developed its Manifestos for the Local and European Elections and supported Irish civil society participation in the UN High level Political Forum in New York in July.

Coalition members, including EAPN Ireland have also participated actively in the Governments quarterly SDG Stakeholder Forums on the implementation of the Goals. There were four Forums in 2019.

The Coalition includes domestic anti-poverty and equality organisations, Trade Unions, international development NGOs and environmental organisations. The Coalition website is www.ireland2030.org.

3. The Organisation

Membership

Despite major changes in the community sector, particularly over the past 10 years, EAPN Ireland has over 170 members. These members are organisations and individuals committed to ending the causes and consequences of poverty.

Board

The Board of EAPN Ireland plays an important role in providing leadership to the organisation and met eight times during 2019.

Board Members during this period were:

- Aiden Lloyd (The Rights Platform – Vice-Chair)
- Alphonse Basogomba (Intercultural and Diversity Education Centre – Ireland)
- Anne Loftus (Galway Theatre for Change)
- Farai Calvin Jeyacheya (Zimbabwe Heritage Trust)
- James Cawley (Independent Living Movement Ireland, joined in 2019)
- Joan O'Donnell (Disability Federation of Ireland and rep on EAPN Europe Executive) (Stepped down in 2019)
- John Brennan (Irish Association of Social Workers, joined in 2019)
- Loraine Mulligan (SIPTU)
- Michael Mackey (Galway Simon Communities)
- Michelle Kearns (National Traveller MABS - Chairperson)
- Sive Bresnihan (Comhlámh, Treasurer)
- Teresa Kearney (Longford Women's Link, joined in 2019)
- Tess Murphy (Longford Women's Link, stepped down in 2019)

We would like to thank Tess Murphy and Joan O'Donnell who stepped down from the Board in 2019. Both were long serving and highly active members. Tess had represented EAPN Ireland on the Executive Committee (Board) of EAPN (Europe) for six years and Joan had also participated on the EAPN Executive Committee for a period of time. We welcome James Cawley, John Brennan and Teresa Kearney to the Board.

In 2019 the Board continued to oversee the process of reviewing and updating all governance policies and procedures which started in 2018.

Staff

In 2019 there were no changes to staff. EAPN Ireland has three part-time staff:

- Paul Ginnell, Director
- Irene Byrne, Policy and Communications Officer
- Maureen Gondipon, Administration and Finance Officer

Communications

Communicating with its members, the wider public and policy makers continues to be crucial to the work of EAPN Ireland as a tool for social change. The main communications work is carried out by Irene Byrne, the Policy and Communications Officer.

During the year the new EAPN Ireland website www.eapn.ie went live containing all the latest news and important information on poverty in Ireland and across the EU.

Seven editions of the EAPN Ireland NewsFlash e-newsletter were published in 2019. These go to almost 1,000 recipients to update them on the activities of EAPN Ireland, our European network and other national and European news. EAPN Ireland is also very active on Twitter. There were also a number of press statements on a range of issues including the annual budget and the latest CSO poverty and income statistics for 2018.

Funding

EAPN Ireland receives its core funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNOs). During 2019 one round of 3-year funding ended and EAPN Ireland was successful in its application for funding for three years from mid-2019 to mid-2022. This core funding is critical to EAPN Ireland being able to operate and to draw in additional funding to run the organisation and organise activities.

During 2019 additional funding included funding through EAPN (Europe) to contribute to our work on the Europe 2020 strategy and European Semester and support participation in the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty; the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection supported the preparatory meetings and participation in the Social Inclusion Forum; the European Commission which funded the Citizen Dialogues on the role of the EU in supporting a more equal society; the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission for a project on health inequality and the right to health; the Department of Foreign Affairs to produce the video “Know Your Rights: The European Pillar of Social Rights” and the Department of the Rural and Community Development continued to provide funding for the Community Platform.

Finally, income from the members of EAPN Ireland continues to be an extremely important and valued resource in supporting the ongoing work of the organisation.

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EAPN Ireland receives core funding from the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) which is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development



Rialtas na hÉireann
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