



# 2010 STARTING POINT FOR A NEW DEAL

**9<sup>th</sup> EU MEETING OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY**  
**25–26 JUNE 2010**  
**European Parliament & Charlemagne Building**







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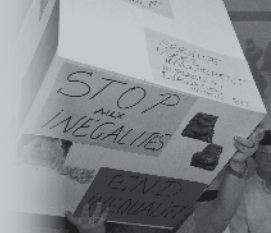
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# Contents

<b>OPENING SESSION</b>	<b>5</b>
Pervenche Berès, MEP, President of Committee for Employment and Social Affairs	5
Isabelle Martinez, on behalf of the Spanish EU-Presidency	5
Lenia Samuel: Deputy Director General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities	5
Adelia Fernandes, Representative of the 8th Meeting, Portuguese delegation	5
<b>FOLLOW UP OF THE KEY DEMANDS FROM THE 8<sup>TH</sup> EU MEETING</b>	<b>7</b>
Commission response to the Demands from Previous European Meetings: Antonia Carparelli, Head of Inclusion Unit, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities	7
Study on impact of EU meetings: Danielle Dierckx, University of Antwerp, Research Center on Inequality, Poverty, Social Exclusion and the City	9
<b>REPORT ON THE WORKSHOPS</b>	<b>11</b>
Priorities identified by Delegations	11
Synthesis report from the Workshops	14
<b>KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>PANEL AND DISCUSSION</b>	<b>21</b>
Juan Mato, General Director Social Policies, Family and Child, Ministry for Health and Social Policy (Spain)	21
Robert Verrue, Director General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities	21
Ludo Horemans, President EAPN	21
Aurelio Fernandez Lopez, President of the Social Protection Committee	21
Interventions from the delegates	21
<b>FINAL REFLECTIONS FROM THE PANEL</b>	<b>23</b>
Closing Plenary	24
Erzsebet Barta, Ministry Social Affairs, Hungary	24
Phillipe Courard, Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty, Belgian EU Presidency	24
Juan Mato, General Director Social Policies, Family and Child, Ministry for Health and Social Policy (Spain)	24

# Opening session



The Opening session was chaired by Ludo Horemans, President EAPN. The Chair welcomed the delegations and guests. He expressed the hope that the 9th meeting would begin a new process where greater efforts are made to show how the recommendations and suggestions from the European meetings are followed up by the policy makers and actors who participate in the meetings. The Chair pointed out the importance of having the meeting in the European Parliament in this special 2010 Year and he also thanked the Spanish Presidency for organising the Meeting and the Commission for its support.

The Opening session was then addressed by:

## **Pervenche Berès, MEP, President of Committee for Employment and Social Affairs**

Ms Berès welcomed the delegates to the European Parliament and wished them every success for their meeting.

She stressed that this EU meeting is a good initiative to give a voice to those who don't have a voice. As a policy maker she expressed the wish to listen and to learn from the people experiencing poverty and to take their needs into account.

She emphasised the challenges we face in times of crisis. That budget cuts should not hit the poorest people, but they do. The fight against poverty should imply a restoration of the welfare states. Europe should bring the economic and social pillar of its policies more in balance, to make sure that the social voice is heard. The challenges are indeed urgent in the fields of access to social services, to housing, to banking and so on.

## **Isabelle Martinez, on behalf of the Spanish EU-Presidency**

Ms Martinez supports the development of an action plan for the next decade and pleads for a strong commitment in the final declaration of the European Year 2010. The Spanish Presidency insisted on improvement of living conditions for all, not losing the welfare state systems, a widening of the Open Method of Co-ordination and stronger EU social policies.

She described the target in the Europe 2020 strategy to reduce by at least 20 million the numbers of people experiencing poverty as an important achievement which should ensure that the fight against

poverty gets greater priority in the EU agenda. She stressed that access to employment is key, but that the anti poverty strategy should take full account of the agreed recommendation on active inclusion. She concluded by saying that policy-making should create willingness, foster dreams and should be based on ideas about building an inclusive future.

## **Lenia Samuel: Deputy Director General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities**

Ms Samuel stressed that these European meetings play an important role to keep poverty on the policy agenda and assured the delegates that the outcomes of the meetings do help to shape strategies in the area of social inclusion.

Ms Samuel reiterated that the Commission is committed to building the participation of people experiencing poverty in the social inclusion policies and strategies. She stated that progress has been made but a lot remains to be done. New partnerships should be strengthened and innovative methods should be developed. She described the 'European Flagship- Platform against Poverty' proposed as part of the Europe 2020 strategy as an opportunity and she said that the Commission will present its proposals for this Platform in the early Autumn. She said the achievement of a target to reduce poverty in the Europe 2020 strategy should help to ensure economic and social cohesion and should support the integration of the fight against poverty into different domains such as health, education and the digital agenda.

## **Adelia Fernandes, Representative of the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting, Portuguese delegation**

Ms Fernandes began by highlighting how important it is that people experiencing poverty have a voice and participate in the social inclusion process. She described how the people she has met at these European meetings have an interior wealth that one can not conquer or buy and can not be learned in any university of the world. Her participation in these European meetings has not meant that she has more economic resources but has made her richer in experience and knowledge.

She described how there are people who think that they will never find themselves in a situation of not having any money. But the economic crisis is proving

the opposite and shows us that we are all vulnerable.

She said that in a democratic and ideal society, independently of the political "colour", we all must have the access to a dignified life. To have a life compatible with human dignity doesn't mean surviving. In an ideal society, when we are able, we have to work to provide for our life but we must have a dignified work - not precarious work. To have a dignified life means to have access to all rights, that at this moment, only some people in society have: the right to a house in good living conditions; the right to go on holidays; the right to have access to culture, to go to the cinema

and the theatre. We should not have to be obliged to choose between essential things and in these essential things, holidays and the access to culture must be included. We should have these rights, independently of our condition: of being in ill-health, having been dismissed or having retired.

Ms Fernandes concluded by saying that the combat against poverty must be a collective fight of all. She thanked the politicians and decision makers, that were available to participate in this Meeting (regardless of the small number of them) and called on them to meet their responsibility in order to not let down this cause.



# Follow up of the key demands from the 8<sup>th</sup> EU Meeting

## **Commission response to the demands from Previous European Meetings: Antonia Carparelli, Head of Inclusion Unit, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities**

Ms Carparelli began her intervention by saying that she was very struck by what she heard at the European Round Table on poverty and social exclusion in France in 2006, when people experiencing poverty stated: "We cannot wait any longer!" The gap between good intentions and actions to follow up on these intentions is too long especially for people who are living in poverty and need immediate responses to their situation. She acknowledged that in trying to show how policy makers try to follow up from the proposals made at these European meetings this gap between intentions and real actions on the ground becomes very visible. In addition she acknowledged that while good things have happened we have to admit that the objective in the Lisbon-strategy of 2000 - to make a decisive impact on poverty eradication

– did not succeed. In trying to show how the recommendations from the European meetings have been followed up we have to also be aware of this overall difficult context which is now even more difficult as a result of the 'crisis'.

In terms of follow up from the recommendations of the European Meetings Ms Carparelli insisted that the meetings have influenced the European agenda, in particular on minimum income, the active inclusion strategy, access to housing and homelessness and in relation to the focus on child poverty. However one of the big influences of the meetings has been to demonstrate the importance of the participation of people experiencing poverty and this has given momentum to similar processes within Member States and has reinforced the demands for the necessary involvement of stakeholders in anti poverty strategies. She expressed the hope that the European Platform against Poverty could build on this practice.

In advance of the meeting Ms Carparelli had provided a table to show how the Commission has tried to respond to the key demands from previous meetings. This table is presented here for information.



## FOLLOW UP OF DEMANDS COMING FROM THE EUROPEAN MEETINGS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

### AREA 1: OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES

<u>Demands from the Meetings</u>	<u>Commission Response</u>
Reduce the gap between economic and social policies	EUROPE 2020; headline poverty reduction target, new social guideline to ensure follow up.
Priority on Active Inclusion, Child poverty, migrants	These issues have been followed up and further follow up is planned in the Commission's work programme.
Media involvement	The designation of 2010 as the Year to combat poverty and social exclusion is intended to raise awareness and involve the media.

### AREA 2: FINANCIAL INCLUSION

<u>Demands from the Meetings</u>	<u>Commission Response</u>
Micro-credit schemes to be made available	New micro-credit facility for young people and self-employed partly funded through PROGRESS
Minimum income adequate to live in dignity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2008 Active Inclusion Recommendation includes this demand</li> <li>• Follow-up report on adequacy of minimum income schemes in Member States</li> <li>• European Parliament Report supporting minimum income schemes above poverty threshold</li> <li>• Priority under 2010 Round Table and informal ministerial meeting</li> </ul>

### AREA 3: HOUSING EXCLUSION AND HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness should be a key focus for action	2009 Thematic year on homelessness - results in 2010 Joint Report
Housing should be a focus of Structural Funds	Enhanced use of Structural Funds for improving housing stock agreed

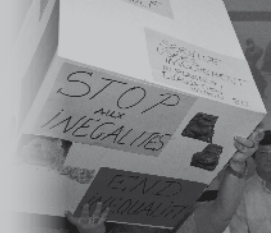
### AREA 4: SERVICES

Universal right to access social services	Identified as the Third pillar of Active Inclusion
Access to affordable and quality health care for all	Commission Communication on health inequalities
Equal opportunities in education	EUROPE 2020: headline target for reducing early school drop-out; Youth on the Move Flagship initiative
Affordable access to energy and other basic services	EU Energy Package includes focus on energy poverty

### AREA 5: PARTICIPATION

Participation must be regular and be given formal status and structure	Key priority under the EU Platform on poverty and social exclusion
Dialogue at all levels	EU Platform on poverty and social exclusion to enhance further involvement and participation of all stakeholders established under social OMC
Participation of people experiencing poverty	Key objective of social OMC; EY2010 and to be enhanced under the EU Platform on poverty and social exclusion
Indicators for monitoring participation	Commission supported study on the involvement of stakeholders just finalised





## **Study on impact of EU meetings: Danielle Dierckx, University of Antwerp, Research Center on Inequality, Poverty, Social Exclusion and the City**

Danielle Dierckx presented the interim results of the ongoing study on the impact of the EU meetings of people experiencing poverty, at the demand of EAPN and funded by the Belgian Ministry.

The main questions in this study are:

- A. What is the impact on people experiencing poverty?
- B. What is the impact on civil society actors / institutions?
- C. What is the impact on poverty policies? (EU + national level)
- D. How is the participation in the meetings evaluated?

The following research steps are foreseen to collect the information necessary to answer these questions:

*Step 1: Web-survey.* 300 (ex-)participants of the meetings are invited to fill in a questionnaire. Until now 79 persons responded by completing the survey. Different categories of people were involved: policy makers from the EU and the national levels, NGOs, people experiencing poverty, the organising team and academics.

*Step 2: Interviews.* 12 persons agreed to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview. These people are from EAPN, NGOs or Governments.

*Step 3: Case studies.* In 5 countries an in-depth study was developed in order to focus on the evaluation by people experiencing poverty and other stakeholders (NGOs and government). The cases selected are Belgium, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Norway.

In general, 79% of the participants that completed the questionnaire have a better understanding of the situation of people experiencing poverty after participating in the meeting. 80% of the policy makers learned more and acted differently after the meeting(s). Not many of the people experiencing poverty learned more, but 56% of them acted differently after the meeting(s).

The impact on people experiencing poverty was measured by two indicators. For the first indicator, personal development, 87% of the people experienc-

ing poverty reported that the meetings contributed to their personal development in terms of empowerment, emotional support and being respected. A second indicator focused on solidarity between people experiencing poverty. 52% of people experiencing poverty notice more solidarity. They testify to a learning process between people experiencing poverty from different countries. They see that others also have problems; they see how others solve their problems. More engagement and trust in policies and policy makers is generated, because people feel more involved.

On the impact of the meetings on civil society actors and institutions 40% of all respondents say that the meetings had (very) much impact on civil society actors fighting poverty. The meetings stimulated that new organisations were established and facilitated the collaboration between organisations. A less positive result concerns the small impact the meetings had on the public debate.

On the impact on policies, an interesting 'contradictory' result was observed. That is, 59% of the policy makers believe the meetings have had an impact on policies, but 78% of people experiencing poverty see little or no impact from the meetings on the development of policies. Where people experiencing poverty see impact it is in relation to more participation in policy making.

Some specific examples of policy impact that were identified included:

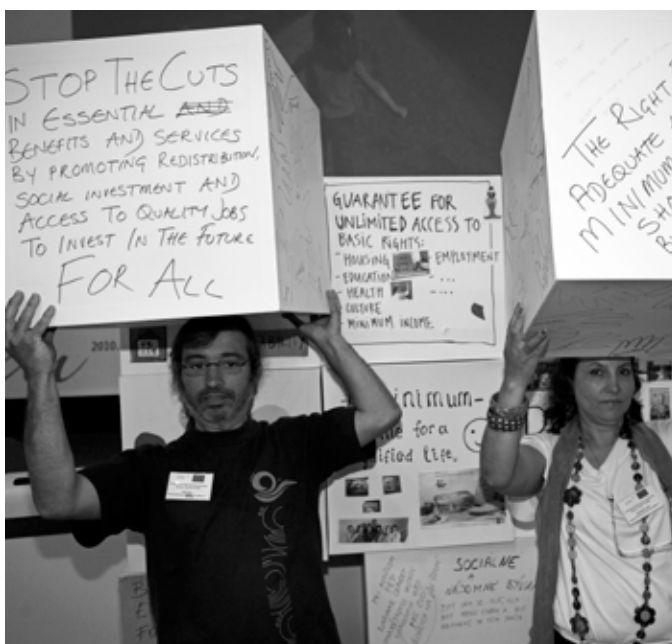
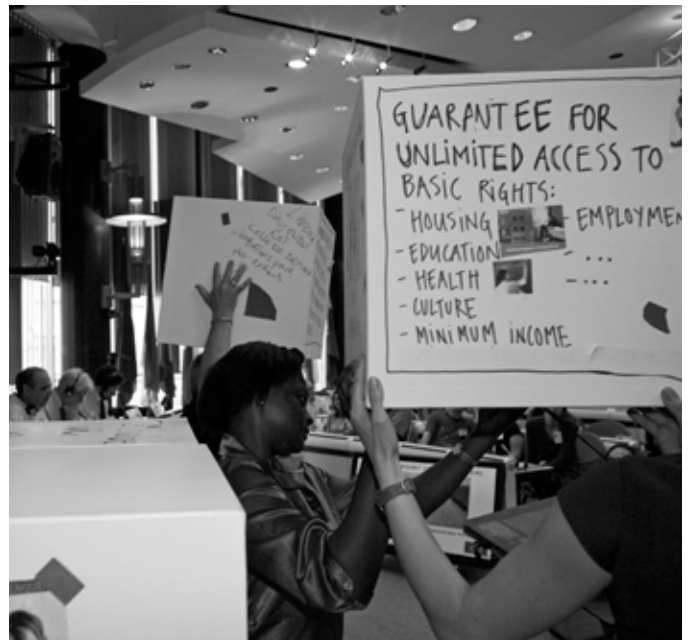
- Policy makers reported getting new insights into what lay hidden behind the poverty figures, what is the 'real life' of people experiencing poverty;
- Poverty entered higher on the policy agenda: politicians started thinking and debating about poverty;
- At the European level, poverty became part of the Europe 2020 agenda. The meetings may have contributed to this outcome;
- The ideas behind the 'Active Inclusion Recommendation' were discussed at the meetings;
- There was some impact on 2010 - European Year against poverty;
- A thematic year on homelessness in the OMC was recommended at the meetings;
- The meetings have helped to raise discussions about Adequate Minimum Income schemes;
- Concerns regarding energy poverty raised at the

meetings have been followed up;

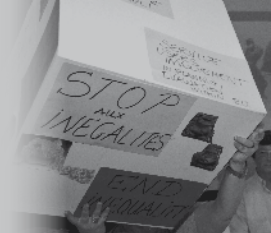
- At the national level, the EU-meeting of People Experiencing Poverty was used as an example for national meetings and practices.

The evaluation of participation in the meetings itself was very positive. Every question scored 75% or more

satisfaction rates. Positive aspects were the high motivation of people to participate, the low work pressure, the good preparation and the absence of language or other participation problems. Some negative remarks were formulated around levels of expectations being too high and the limited presence of politicians.



# Report on the workshops



Delegations of people experiencing poverty prepared themselves to dialogue with policy makers, NGOs, academics and people experiencing poverty from other countries. Members of parliament were explicitly invited to make a contribution in the workshops, only a few Members of Parliament were available to engage in this exercise.

In the eight workshops people experiencing poverty, members of the European Parliament, other policy makers, NGOs and academics exchanged experiences and information on poverty eradication. Discussion was organised on the past and the future of poverty eradication policies. The delegations of people experiencing poverty presented their key priorities for the next ten years for fighting against poverty. These priorities were developed in national preparation processes and were based on a reflection on the demands which had emerged from previous meetings.

## Priorities identified by Delegations



### Austria

We don't want a bench in the park, but a decent house.

Social organisations receive less funding, while the needs are increasing.

It is five to twelve; the poor are running out of time.



### Belgium

As part of the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion (EY2010), the EU should draw up a co-operation plan with organisations representing people experiencing poverty.

Decent housing should be guaranteed for all.



### Bulgaria

Policies are inefficient because of inefficient use of means.

We need a stronger political will to support people, also in the smallest communities.

Poverty measures are inadequate; more qualitative criteria are needed to reflect the reality in Bulgaria compared with the rest of Europe.



### Cyprus

We do not have a universal health system for everybody.

Children should have rights, not like being part of a family, but like any other person. We have to fully implement the Children Rights Convention.



### Czech Republic

It is in the interest of governments to support people experiencing poverty. One should integrate all people in society in order to keep the system going.

Initiatives to create employment should be stimulated, such as removing thresholds to start a small company.

Families in need, orphans, homeless people, Roma people and other groups deserve more support.



### Denmark

Service users should be involved, for example by establishing a council in every municipality.

Social benefits for young people and immigrants are too low.

The right to housing should be implemented.



### Estonia

Third sector has difficulties to access structural funds. Often they need to come up with part of the funding on their own. This is a problem for new organisations.

Homes and health are a priority, together with pensions, life long learning and education for all.



### Finland

There is a good welfare state in northern countries but the system is complex and some people find it hard to find the right office and get the right support.

Participation can be successful. It allows exchange of innovative solutions, which are close to the people and have a human dimension; this is very important.



### France

Precarious employment should be avoided.

Rights should be automatically allocated instead of repeatedly claimed.



### **Germany**

People experiencing poverty should be heard. It is no use that they have to fight to become involved in the development of policy reports on poverty.

More information on poverty is needed to estimate the consequences of laws and regulations better.

A system of permanent training should allow that people may complete higher education later in life.

As poverty leads to illness, health is an important issue.



### **Greece**

The right for housing is a fundamental right, but in Greece it is difficult to access housing. In particular, this is the case for young people. Social housing for homeless is needed.



### **Hungary**

The position of women on the labour market should be improved, so that they are able to combine family life and work. Interesting initiatives are measures for returners, adjustment of working hours, flexibility to take care of the (sick) children and a decent wage.

Measures for participation of youngsters at the labour market should be taken. School leavers without work should get the opportunity to gather work experience in civil organisations. Employers maybe supported financially to employ young people.



### **Italy**

Decision-makers do not attend our meetings; they do not care about our problems. We are frustrated and even choked by their absence today! Are they expecting us to resolve by ourselves all our problems by 2020?

Investments in inclusion and social actions don't exist anymore. And because of that there is more and more violence, more repression and sanctions instead of a focus on prevention.



### **Ireland**

At the EU level, there is a positive trend towards a minimum income. Yet, on the national levels, there are also trends to reduce the amount. This would aggravate the situation of lots of people.

Policymakers should be more accountable. That means to make sure there is a follow up and to monitor it. It is necessary to demonstrate how the fight against poverty is a high priority of the EU agenda and to show what steps have been taken.



### **Latvia**

Services (mobile phones, heating, water) are very expensive. We see the results of privatizations and liberalizations of the market.

The government prepared a reorganisation of the state budget, because of the crisis. Taxes are raising and social budgets are cut. Government is not thinking at all of helping poor people.



### **Lithuania**

Investing in requalification of employees is needed to give them the opportunity of added qualification to shift careers and to have more tools in case of crisis of their sectors.

The use and allocation of European structural funds can be improved.

Families should be supported because they are the cornerstones of society.



### **Luxemburg**

Housing is an important issue as some people spend half of their income on it. There is a lack of social housing and of affordable housing.

A one-stop desk for any social issue helps to overcome information deficits.

Access to credits should be better organised.



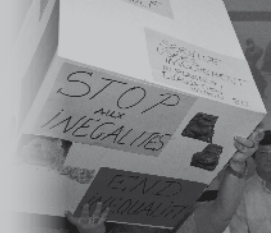
### **Malta**

Better access to European funds for social projects of NGOs is needed. If they work well, why not continue to support them?

Permanent funding for organisations who work closely with people in need is recommended.

Service users' involvement should be organised in planning, implementation and monitoring of services.





### **Norway**

We should challenge our politicians to care about social housing. There is enough money and space, but politicians have no courage to make housing affordable.

We can have a minimum income, because in Norway there is money. Being poor in Norway is ridiculous.



### **Poland**

Institutions should be better informed on homelessness, so that they understand these people better.

The European funds should be more accessible and should benefit in the first place the people experiencing poverty.



### **Portugal**

There is a lack of information. People do not know their rights (free health care, filling in the papers). People do not know about services.

Systems for responsible borrowing and lending should be developed in order to live in a decent way.



### **Romania**

More investments in education are key. This means providing education in rural areas, for disadvantaged population, for children with problems. Education should be free for all and a better quality of education should be guaranteed to obtain qualified jobs.

Adequate income, decent salaries and good working conditions are necessary to make progress in life.

Equal opportunities for all should be realised.



### **Slovakia**

Women have very precarious jobs; they should be better protected.

There is a huge need for social, affordable housing. Even young people are evicted from their homes and end up in the streets. They lose their future.



### **Slovenia**

There is only one goal: all human rights in all domains have to be realised. In reality these rights are less and less respected.



### **Spain**

Disabled people should receive orthopaedic means for free.

Eliminate the architectonic barriers, but also the mental ones.

A certain percentage of the budget should be earmarked to combat poverty.

Health care for drug addicts deserves more attention.



### **Sweden**

We don't pay enough attention to child poverty and children experiencing poverty in families.

It's important to have financial means to do some research, in order to better identify the problems and the possible solutions.



### **The Netherlands**

Housing costs, including costs for energy, should not take the biggest part out of the household budget.

On different levels, well-organised participation structures should be available.



### **United Kingdom**

Financial education should be in the school curriculum so that young people know about financial management early on.

The out of work benefit is inadequate in relation to average earnings. The recent budget announcements have made it even worse – we will see public service cuts.

# Synthesis report from the Workshops

The main results of the workshops are summarized through three questions:

1. What does poverty mean in the year 2010?
2. Who is willing to fight poverty?
3. How should we fight poverty?

Quotes from discussions in the workshops are used to illustrate the point that has been made.

## What does poverty mean in the year 2010?

Some people deny that poverty exists. Because it is not easy to define people experiencing poverty, because they sometimes live their lives invisibly and isolated, their problems are denied.

But poverty is reality and more and more people are testifying about what living in poverty means.

*"My rent has gone from 800 to 900 euro per month in three years. The average is at 850 euro but excludes charges such as heating. I will have to move from 80 square meters to 50, with three children". (Finland)*

Poverty and social exclusion are often related to a lack of an adequate income. People are unemployed on a long term basis. People are disabled or facing health problems. People have a job, but are not paid enough.

*"I work 10 hours a day but my income is based on a 3 hours a day contract! In Italy, the situation is difficult and the government does not support us". (Italy)*

A lack of income is not the only cause or feature of poverty. Problems are situated in different domains; poverty is a multidimensional problem.

*"The needs and demands of people experiencing poverty are not unreal, they are justified. We have the right to decent housing, a decent wage and a decent job. We should live decently and should be respected. Housing, work, health, education,... these are rights, but they aren't realized!" (Poland)*

On top of this, problems in several domains are linked to each other. For example, not having a decent house is linked to a lack of income, bad health and to problems accessing the labour market. A holistic, integrated policy approach should take this complexity into account.

The group of people experiencing poverty is very diverse and to develop effective strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion, it is important to face this diversity. Examples of groups that are experiencing poverty are immigrants, children, single parent families, disabled people and people with mental

health problems. All of these groups have specific needs.

*"The migrant issue in Greece is not about financial request; it is about being legal, being nobody in community. We want a future for our children."*

*"I live on the minimum amount of income in my country. I have to live with 500 euro with all my family. I made a request for social housing, but I don't have enough points to get one. I live then in a camp, a wet camp, very bad for my wife's health. It would be a miracle to get social housing. No bank would give me a loan, even if I get a guarantee: I am discriminated against because I am a Rom!" (Italy)*

*"Single parent families are vulnerable. Child poverty is in these families a real risk. It is difficult to have a child on your own. These women are discriminated, are lacking income support from government. If you have a husband, you have better conditions than when being a single parent." (Greece)*

How many people are experiencing poverty? The search for an adequate measurement is not easy and not innocent at all. Norms and values are lying at the basis of the choices to be made. Determining who is poor by indicating a threshold implies the judgment of who deserves society's support.

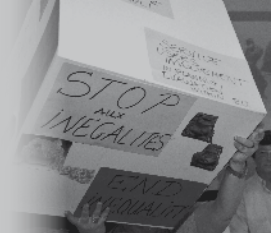
*"Only through personal stories can politicians understand what is going on. Politicians should listen to poor people, poor people are not in statistics; they do not have a clear picture about poverty." (Portugal)*

We have to warn against a double risk in poverty measurement. The first risk lies in having too broad an indicator. For example, the indicator on jobless households could include all pensioners. We have to be aware that retirement is not equal to poverty. This would distract the policy attention away from the severe and urgent poverty situations.

*"When criteria are expanded, one creates more people experiencing poverty and goals become less ambitious." (Belgium)*

A second risk is when indicators are too strict. By focusing only on extreme poverty, for example, support and services for a large amount of people experiencing poverty can be ignored.

In addition, it has been stressed that we need indicators apart from economic growth that instead are looking at the welfare of society. Only considering growth is inadequate. The indicators should look at people's position in society and their well being.



The year 2010 will probably be more remembered as the year of the economic crisis than as the year of combating poverty and social exclusion. The effects of the crisis draw the attention of policy makers and some of them are even declaring that once the crisis is solved, poverty will disappear as well. Nothing is less true. Poverty exists longer than the current economic crisis.

*"The poor are not responsible for the crisis and the crisis did not bring poverty, but it accentuated it. There were people experiencing poverty before the crisis". (Slovenia)*

In times of crisis, investment in people is key. This means that cuts in benefits and social services should be avoided.

*"We must not lose sight of the need for coherent social policy in responses to the crisis. What is happening in reality is that frontline services are getting cut and it's the poor that are bearing the brunt of the crisis. But if you look at the origins of the crisis it's not the poor who caused it". (United Kingdom)*

*"Part of our job is to remind these people that you can't get out of this situation and meet poverty goals (in Europe or internationally in terms of the millennium development goals) if you're only looking at it from a perspective of cuts. You don't help the economy to get moving again unless people have access to daily necessities and keep things going." (United Kingdom)*

### **Who is willing to fight poverty?**

Fighting poverty and social exclusion is not a one-man job. It needs the efforts of all. For some it is a duty. For others it is an opportunity.

*"We can talk about participation until we're blue in the face but people will never get involved until they feel represented by their governments." (Ireland)*

Although some progress was made in some countries, a clear message is formulated towards policymakers. People in power have to be more accountable than they are today. It is their duty to take actions, and to make these actions visible.

To be more accountable means to make sure there is a follow up and monitoring of actions. To stimulate politicians to respect their engagements, proposals should be research-based, discussed in a participatory process and actions should be monitored. Then, decision-makers will have no other choice but to reflect on the impact of their policies. It is necessary to involve the people concerned in the monitoring of these actions.

Some policy makers confess that sometimes pressure from outside is necessary to make things move within the policy making process.

*"People experiencing poverty should be more involved in the preparation and implementation of policies. Only the representativeness of their organisations remains to be questioned." (France)*

It is also a question of communication: the European Union does not communicate properly on its actions. In European countries, there might be excellent projects, but the information is not disseminated enough. It implies that decision-makers should consider how to make their actions visible.

The voice of people experiencing poverty is crucial in shaping the fight against poverty. It is an opportunity to make use of their experiences. Instead of passively staying on the side, these people are eager to contribute to solutions.

*"We are not here for a privilege, but because it is a citizen's duty." (Romania)*

The knowledge of people experiencing poverty delivers extra information in order to develop adequate and efficient policy actions.

*"Politicians are detached from reality. We don't talk the same language." (Poland)*

*"Collaboration is important. NGOs should be involved in the work of parliament. They know best how to translate the political into daily practice. By involving NGOs the most effective strategies may be developed." (Slovenia)*

This participation in policy making may be organised at different levels.

The local level is interesting because of the small scale. Topics to be discussed are close to daily realities and to the environment where people experiencing poverty live. Client councils are one of the instruments that may be installed to shape participation of people experiencing poverty.

The European level can also generate opportunities. A specific demand is that people experiencing poverty should be in the heart of the proposed European Platform against Poverty. At the same time National Platforms must also be created. Monitoring the actions of these Platforms and the participation of people experiencing poverty in them could help to ensure that progress is made regarding the participation of people experiencing poverty in policy making.

To avoid that participation will be reduced to informing people when all decisions and plans are already made, we should emphasize that participation should be established in all phases of the policy making process.

#### Merits for the participants

*"Someone of our organisation was homeless for more than 20 years. By intermediation and support they offered him a permanent job. For him, it felt like prison. In our group he could talk openly and in confidence about his feelings and this was a huge support for him." (Austria)*

*"Activism and taking part helped me to no longer feel isolated – to feel supported and to know that you have more power in numbers. It also helped me to build a consistent project to fight against poverty – practical solutions are needed. Being part of a network helps you move forward in life – I want to struggle for a better world." (Belgium)*

#### Merits for all

*"In remote areas, there live, amongst others, parents with bad school experiences. They want to give their children the best opportunities to develop themselves in society and to succeed in school. By mutual confrontation between these parents and the schools, we succeeded in changing the culture of blaming each other and developing a constructive collaboration. Because everyone has at the end the same goal: good opportunities for the children."*

The role of NGOs should be emphasized. Of course, civil society and NGOs are not very well developed. Investing in organisations is needed to realize that dialogue.

*"NGOs are able to facilitate the dialogue". (The Netherlands)*

*"In Estonia, we find that when we speak about involvement, it is really crucial that NGOs have more power. Third sector actions offer immediate tangible results. It's important that people can see that something has changed in their life."*

A culture of dialogue should be established and therefore a learning process should be established.

*"Participation should be part of education and training. How can we learn from each other to come to a good dialogue? Training of experts in experiencing poverty and social exclusion is also important." (Bulgaria)*

#### How should we fight poverty?

*"Why aim to help 20 million people experiencing poverty to integrate in society in 2020, while the other 60 million stay excluded?"(Slovakia)*

To strengthen poverty policies, existing instruments should be better used than today. It concerns for example the fundamental rights charters, European funds, the implementation of existing legislation and the European Year for the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Fundamental rights are written down in different conventions. But in the case of poverty, the problem is that they are not accessible for all and enforceable.

*"Participation should be seen as giving everyone the possibility to be informed and to claim the rights by complaints. Does any jurisdiction exist on this? The information on rights should be spread in order that rights are respected"*

*"By having more information people can make better use of services. That stimulates their self esteem and self confidence. This may have positive effects on the way people experiencing poverty are treated." (The Netherlands)*

The European year against poverty and social exclusion is a good instrument to attract attention to the problem and to put it on the policy agenda.

*"We want EU citizens to change the way that they see people in difficulty."*

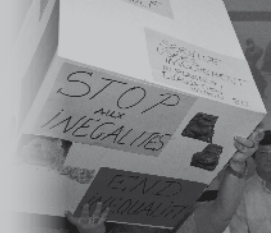
Funding for projects to eradicate poverty do exist, but mostly these are limited in time and results need to be delivered on too short a term. After a positive evaluation more funding should be given on a long term basis.

*"Applying for European funding is a good thing. But we notice an administrative unwieldiness that causes problems. Our capacities are limited to use these funds in a good way." (Bulgaria)*

The gap between existing laws and the implementation of these laws has to be abolished.

*"There is a gap between the emergency of the situation and the objectives that the EU fixed. There is also a gap between theories (laws, rights) and the reality of the people experiencing poverty. Laws and rights exist but they are not respected. It is time to make sure that these laws are respected, and that people have a real access to their rights and can exert them in their daily life."*





Poverty is a multidimensional problem. Actions in several domains are needed to make a difference. Priorities are related to housing, income and child poverty.

**Housing:** Problems were raised concerning the low quality of houses and the costs to rent or to buy them.

*"In Sweden, we lack residences for everybody, so the rents go up. If there were enough houses for everybody, rents wouldn't be that high today". (Sweden)*

Besides housing, the environment is important. People are pleading for socially safe environments that offer chances and opportunities to children.

*"Affordable housing should go alongside all redevelopment. Control and assessment mechanisms should be put in place to avoid speculation that aims to evict people from these areas. Ghettoisation is another problem." (Belgium)*

*"We want decent and safe houses in a social and safe environment. The neighbourhood is very determining. We want a future-oriented environment." (The Netherlands)*

The length of time people have to spend waiting in homeless shelters to get into housing is unacceptable.

*"Politicians do not understand what decent housing means because they live in comfortable housing – they don't realize what it means to raise a family in overcrowded conditions and the impact that this can have on educational attainment and other factors." (United Kingdom)*

Once you have a house then access to affordable energy supplies must also be taken into consideration.

*"Adequate heating is another issue. The houses are often so old that heating costs become really high – for those who have prepaid meters the situation goes from bad to worse. Clearly, there are strong links to health. If we're talking about cutting costs we should have people in decent accommodation that reduces fuel costs and reduces crime." (United Kingdom)*

*"The costs for heating and energy keep on increasing and lead sometimes to eviction of families. In Poland, last winter 2000 dead people were counted because of the cold. There should be a maximum threshold for energy costs and eviction should be forbidden." (Poland)*

**Income:** Inequality in society is painfully visible when considering the differences in income between the richest and the poorest. People experiencing poverty have to survive and are humiliated by the bad conditions in which they have to live. Debts with criminally

high interests are made to buy elementary things such as food. Therefore, the debate on an adequate and appropriate income for dignified lives for all can no longer remain unanswered. It is time for action.

*"Many governments say it's not the right time to ask for a rise in benefits now, but we have to contradict this. Economists back this idea that social expenditure is not a cost but an investment. It's against EU2020 to advise governments to cut social expenditure. Also raising minimum income brings more money into the economy. People in poverty need it for essential things – heating etc. Raising minimum income could be seen as of benefit for the economy of the country." (Belgium)*

*"Every citizen should be able to access financial services. Before the next meeting of the people experiencing poverty, the European Commission will take some initiatives to ensure access to basic financial services." (European policy maker)*

*"Single mothers are often ready to work as volunteers – society is not always providing work for everyone. Society benefits from volunteers, so we should see if we can pay these people for this valuable, useful work." (Greece)*

**Child Poverty:** Children are the future and child poverty is a major concern for everyone that is occupied with fighting poverty and social exclusion. The driving force for people experiencing poverty to carry on with their lives is that they want to give their children a better future. Structural exclusion mechanisms should be tackled to help shape a sustainable context for children to grow up in.

*"Children are a vulnerable, unprotected group in the society. They cannot do anything to break out from poverty. It's important to detect the problems early. Education is an urgent matter: in Estonia, many students drop out of school. We should detect very early the children who need help. There are sensitive periods in every child's development. No talent should be overlooked!" (Estonia)*

Access to education is a basic condition to invest in a better future.

*"In the rural areas schools are closing because the population is leaving... so it's really usual to have at primary school single-classes with children between 6 to 10 years old all together. The private schools are rising and the public school is without means. We need an education at a good level for all!" (Romania)*

It is crucial to break the cycle of poverty. Child poverty is a family issue, including single and isolated parents. It goes hand in hand with family issues such as access to social services, access to education, a decent income, employment and being documented. Policies to combat child poverty should support families because they, in all their forms, are the driving forces of society.

*"Many people leave sons, daughters or whole families alone to find work in Western Europe. These children live with this big loss and grow up alone without the right support. This also causes mental problems. The EU has to support families because family is the society's driving poverty." (Lithuania)*

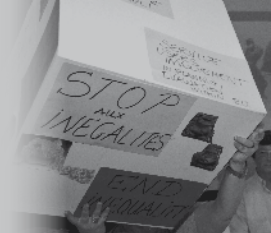
Access to social services is one strategy to improve the situation of families, but this is not guaranteed for all.

*"One-stop shops would help. At this moment there are lots of offices and it's not easy to understand what you have to do to get help. It should be simplified so that people have an overview of the system. The aim is to avoid humiliating people looking for help." (Greece)*

It is clear that weaknesses in protecting and supporting people experiencing poverty by the state are compensated by informal solidarity between ordinary people. We may not tolerate that this is the only way to survive daily life.

*"In our organisation (a child protection agency), we ensure hot food for children from poor families (during the school holiday, they don't get hot meals). Some of us are working there as volunteers, being unemployed ourselves." (Estonia)*

# Key Priorities for the next 10 years



Each workshop was asked to identify two key priorities for the coming 10 years. This exercise raised interesting debates and some key trends common to the feedback from all workshops included:

- Delegates insisted on the need to “think globally”. People affected by poverty and social exclusion are human beings, they don’t live their lives in compartments, education, health, employment and housing needs are all interlinked. Poverty is an injustice and people experiencing poverty demand their human rights, all their human rights. Human rights cannot be cut into small pieces. Most of the time, decision makers, academics, social workers are working by splitting the realities into several lacks or problems. Maybe is it the way to work efficiently, but by doing this, it becomes difficult for people experiencing poverty to speak about their global reality.
- In order to develop and install participation (or more participation) from where is it best to start? This question was discussed in some workshops, and delegates seem to be agreed in saying that participation has to start at the local level, then at the regional and national levels and, finally, at the EU level. Another way to say it, is that delegates recognized that there is a lot of work to do ‘at home’, with the support of their NGOs and the openness and cooperation of their decision makers.
- Last but not least, delegates have repeated in a strong way that people experiencing poverty are stronger when they are working and thinking together, at all levels, when they have opportunities to exchange experiences, to learn from each other whatever the different aspects of poverty they are suffering.

The priorities identified in each workshop were presented in the final plenary and were written on the sides of cubes which were placed on top of each other to build a wall of priorities for the coming years. The priorities identified were expressed as follows:

***We want an adequate minimum income for a decent life for all, especially families.***

***The legacy of EU2010 should be that the proposed poverty platform involves all relevant stakeholders, with people experiencing poverty at the heart of this.***

***Guarantee the access without barriers and obstacles to fundamental rights, such as housing, employment, minimum income, education, health and culture.***

***Guarantee the effective participation of people concerned in the making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies.***

***The approach of poverty may not be fragmented. It is necessary to fight poverty and social exclusion through a global approach.***

***Priorities in the fight against poverty are:***

***To increase the supply of housing, in particular social housing***

***To take the family into account***

***To support disabled people***

***To facilitate access to work***

***To facilitate access to services***

***Migration***

***Participation***

***Equality and rights for all!***

***Build a Europe for all!***

***Don't let people in poverty pay for the crisis!***

***End inequalities (in practice)***

***Put people at the centre!!! Persons first!!!***

***No more blah blah blah!!!***

***Poverty is as important as global warming!!***

***A minimum income for a dignified life and active participation. We need participation to define what a dignified life is.***

***Government is responsible for not cutting the social budgets and to find instruments to provide a life in dignity for its citizens.***

***Decision-makers should be made accountable for all their decisions. For this, it is important that decisions are research-based, that they are the result of a participatory process, and that progress towards the objective is closely monitored, on the basis of commonly agreed indicators.***

***Children, as children, and as tomorrow's adults, need to be a key focus of social policies. If you meet the needs of children, you meet the needs of all human beings. Child well-being and the social inclusion of children need to be considered in its multidimensionality.***

***Participation: We want to have more information, so that we are able to join in the thinking, the talking, the developing and the decision making in policies.***

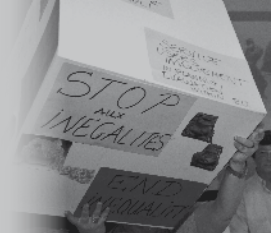
***Housing: Every European citizen should have the right to live in an affordable and good quality house in a socially safe environment with access to affordable utilities (water, gas, electricity).***

*The right for adequate and appropriate minimum income should be enforced by all national governments.*

*Stop the cutting of essential benefits and services by promoting of redistribution, social investments and access to quality jobs to invest into the future for all.*



# Panel and discussion



**José Manuel Fresno (President of the Spanish Council for Equal Treatment and Non Discrimination)** chair of the session invited each of the four members of the panel to react to the summary of the results of the workshops and on the presented demands from the delegations.

## **Juan Mato, General Director Social Policies, Family and Child, Ministry for Health and Social Policy (Spain)**

Mr Mato stressed that the appeal for accountability for decisions attracted his attention. Especially in the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion it is key to speak about decisions. These decisions should be linked to rights. It is essential to have access to rights and services, to ensure a decent life for everybody. He continued with reference to the economic crisis by saying that our aim is to find a way out of the crisis and to make sure that social rights are respected. In this decade, we should convert these rights into rights for people in practice, which they can demand.

## **Robert Verrue, Director General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities**

Mr Verrue stated that the work that is done during the conference will help in developing policies. The priorities, as presented on the cubes by delegates from the workshops, have to be respected, and the details of these preferences should be studied. For example, the comments made on the difference between minimum wage and minimum income were useful. He recognizes the fact that rights exist, but that it is still difficult to benefit from these rights. It is one thing to have the rights, but they also have to be understandable and accessible. Tangible rights are needed, that imply solutions.

## **Ludo Horemans, President EAPN**

Mr Horemans continues by stressing two tracks, speaking from the viewpoint of people experiencing poverty. First, fundamental rights are key, but how can we get access and how can we enforce them? Secondly, poverty has to do with every aspect of our lives and can not be reduced to a single area. Participation

is important and because we are human beings, we want to belong, to be taken seriously. It applies to all the different categories: single parents, migrants and children. Children are entitled to grow up in a family and therefore we have to invest in resolving poverty.

It is also important to see what poverty destroys inside people and the efforts they have to make to survive.

Because of the importance of participation of people experiencing poverty in society, Mr. Horemans formulates a specific policy recommendation in that direction. Currently, policy makers are developing a European Poverty Platform. People experiencing poverty should be at the centre of this platform. The European Platform cannot be set up without national platforms, Mr. Horemans states. The annual meeting of people experiencing poverty cannot be an isolated event; it should be part of this process. Hopefully next year a new step will be taken, because the follow up of the proposals is not sufficient.

## **Aurelio Fernandez Lopez, President of the Social Protection Committee**

Mr Fernandez Lopez explained briefly the role of the Social Protection Committee. He furthermore reflected on social rights by saying that to talk about rights is also talking about strategies and actions. For example access to social protection and finances needs to be consolidated.

He recognized the demands regarding adequacy of Minimum Income schemes but he warned that achieving this will be a difficult way forward. Even if in the 'crisis' it is shown that automatic stabilizing impacts of good social protection systems are working, it will still be difficult to ensure that this is recognized as a positive investment. He stressed that it is not sufficient to limit initiatives to strategies to include people in labour market only and that is why it will be necessary to defend a broader EU strategy on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

## **Interventions from the delegates**

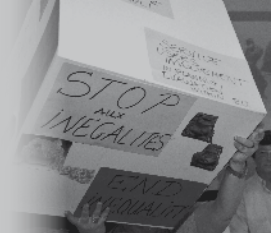
Following this first round of interventions from the panel the Chair invited the delegates to contribute to the debate. Contributions were made from almost all the national delegations. The topics raised differed to a large degree. This is a brief overview:

- Single parents don't get any kind of governmental support. There should be a minimum income per

capita, so also per child. In Luxemburg, a good example is developed.

- It was noted that all the speakers that promised to come, are here today, so we are finally taken seriously.
- Redistribution is key: there should be social benefits for everybody. Social benefits are cut nowadays, because it concerns the weakest people. By the meetings we become stronger and we will come back every year to ask for our rights. It is not our fault that governments have no money.
- Concerns and fear are expressed that policy makers will not spend any money on social issues. What about e.g. overpopulation in jails (Italy)? We should be informed and involved in how funding is spent.
- Involvement of vulnerable people needs to be integrated in the EU-structures, in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Invisible groups exist like the ones living in camps. Immigration problem needs to be addressed by EU-policies.
- NGOs have difficulties to access funds but at European level it is too bureaucratic; they should be more accessible.
- EU-projects cannot last longer than 3 years: they should be extended.
- We are individually vulnerable but not together.
- Politicians are not enough present; we should change opinions and share positive energy.
- Social services should be paid for by governments.
- Dental hygiene should be at the highest priority, because nobody wants to employ someone with bad teeth.
- We are still not focused on social Europe!
- Politicians say that we need more proposals developed in depth, but this information is available. The proposals are there for years, what we need is the political will to act on them.
- Fighting poverty should be more ambitious than helping only 20 million people.
- We have to fight against poverty. Rights are only on paper, but don't exist in reality.

- Politicians want to fight poverty, but they don't need to fight it in their offices: they should come to our associations.
- Losing a job at the age of 50 is very hard, especially because of the crisis.
- There is a need to fight corruption: legislation should be much stricter. The rule of law should be motivated. A stricter social policy and fight economic criminality are needed.
- In Lithuania, we try to talk about methadone. People die from it, but government invests in it while they know it doesn't work.
- Social services and business should go hand in hand.
- Voices of the people experiencing poverty need to be heard. Reports and meetings shouldn't be used as a delay to take actions.
- Participation is the engine in the fight against poverty. It should be enshrined in a law, so that it becomes implemented.
- More attention needs to be paid here on disabled people, e.g. barriers to employment. Also a mental switch is needed: stop treating these people as children who cannot take care of themselves.
- Everybody should be recognized as human beings.
- This meeting should help us monitor and force realizing better lives. Poor people don't have time to wait anymore.
- Rights are a tool to accomplish goals. Rights and obligations go hand in hand. Why is it that we cannot realize a European minimum income?
- Bulgaria with its 60% measure of minimum income (250 euro) is by this threshold as poor as Germany but in reality it is ten times poorer. We should be careful with this kind of measurement.
- The system of child benefits in Finland is counted as income and so the other benefits are diminished. This is not fair.



## Final reflections from the panel

Mr Verrue wants to emphasize that policy makers listened carefully to the messages. In ten years things evolved. Before, there was almost no debate on poverty. The meetings have contributed to reaching the right track.

Mr Fernandez Lopez emphasized that poverty is rising, also in times of growth (e.g. in 2005-2007). He praises the fact that a European goal to reduce poverty is there for the first time. It should be used as a new tool as much as possible.

Mr Mato referred to the objectives in the EU2020 strategy and he calls for everyone with an active role in society to contribute to it and to follow up of the progress. It is not only a question of economic forces lobbying, but also EAPN, the Social Platform and others will have a greater role to play. If the social majority is into combating poverty, we can move forward.

Mr Horemans asked every Member State to implement the recommendation on Active Inclusion. That consists of adequate minimum income, an inclusive labour market and access to quality services. He stressed that the Commission has a key role to monitor the Member States actions to implement these agreed principles. He stated the EAPN belief of the need to go further and introduce a Framework Directive on Minimum Income Schemes. The economic crisis cannot be used as excuse for not raising social benefits/minimum income. Several economists testified that it is possible and desirable.

# Closing Plenary

## **Erzsebet Barta, Ministry of Social Affairs, Hungary**

Mrs Barta explained the social policies in Hungary. For example, social inclusion and tackling poverty will be taken by the department of public administration and justice. In the next decade, the country has job creation as a primary goal.

At the European level, the poverty target is not based only on one indicator. She sees as positive that the target also included jobless households and material deprivation. She states that this permits to also pay attention to the fragile situation of all people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. She also highlighted the need to address child poverty. She also stressed that in many countries the situation of Roma needs to be tackled as a priority. She said she looked forward to engaging with the European Platform against Poverty which she hoped would ensure progress in the fight against poverty.

She reflected on these EU-meetings as a unique event. People experiencing poverty can talk about their experiences and practices. Its merits lie in the exchange of good practices and in strengthening cooperation between actors. She mentions the firm commitment to continue the dialogue. Hungary will hold the next and 10th meeting.

## **Phillipe Courard, Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty, Belgian EU Presidency**

Mr Courard reminded that it was during the Belgian Presidency in 2001 that the first meeting of people experiencing poverty was organised. People were excluded from decision making. Now we evolved to the annual obligation to organise this EU-meeting. Over the years more people experiencing poverty are involved and speaking, which is a positive thing. A content exchange between people experiencing poverty and politicians is stimulated, although it is not enough yet. The impact study showed that 80% of the politicians/policy makers who have taken part in these meetings did learn things, so it is the right way forward.

Mr Courard drew attention to the fact that we didn't succeed in reducing poverty by 2010; it even increased. The new goal set at the EU-level is not enough. Everybody should play their role to go beyond that goal.

The Round Table on Social Inclusion and the second European Meeting of Ministers responsible for poverty reduction which will be held in October is an opportunity for that.

Next to meetings and speeches, proper and tangible results are necessary. The Secretary of State is committed to make such progress during the Belgian Presidency.

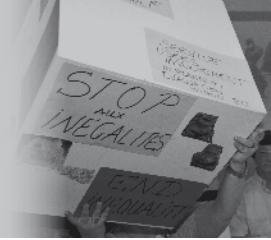
## **Juan Mato, General Director Social Policies, Family and Child, Ministry for Health and Social Policy (Spain)**

The Spanish Presidency is convinced that the meeting was very useful. He stressed the importance of the adoption of the poverty target in the Europe 2020 strategy. Mr. Mato states that the results of the Presidency were good, but he stressed that different actors contributed to this success: NGOs, governments, the Presidency. However he stressed that over the next months and years we will need to remain fully committed to ensure we take the most of the opportunities that will be presented through the Europe 2020 strategy and through the outcomes of the 2010 Year.

He closed the meeting by thanking all the delegations for their hard work and thanking all those who have ensured the success of the meeting. He expressed thanks to the European Parliament, the Commission, the European Council, the organising committee and EAPN for their particular contributions. He concluded by expressing the important cooperation between the Trio of Presidencies (Spain, Belgium and Hungary) who have cooperated to ensure continuity and follow up of the priorities of their Presidencies.

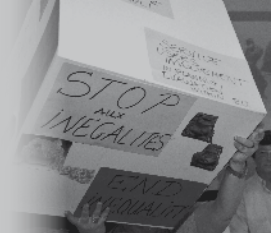


# List of Participants



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	José	PASCAL	DAL Liège
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	Ekaterina Pavlova	HRISTOVA	EAPN Bulgaria
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	Erik	NEDBAL	PODANE RUCE
	Mazac	FRANTISEK	PODANE RUCE
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	Chrystalla	DEMETRIOU	EAPN Cyprus
	Efrosini	APOSTOLIDOU	EAPN Cyprus
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<b>Estonia</b>	Leif	JENSEN	SAND
	Per	KRAGH	SAND
	René	KOHN	SAND
	Jesper	LAURITZEN	SAND
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	Piia	HILANDER	
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	Sylvie	LISSE	Association Action
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	Houari	BRAHIMI	
<b>Germany</b>	Ali	ALLAOUI	
	Robert	SCHMIEDL	
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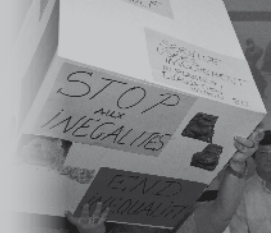
	Wolfgang	KREBS	BAG Schuldnerberatung
	Frank	WERNER	MoB e.v Strassenfeger
	Jurgen	WEBER	Hartz iv Betroffene e.V
<b>Greece</b>	Maria	KALDANI	EAPN Greece
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	Hawanatu	SANKOH	
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	Melinda	SZEMES	Hungarian Anti Poverty Network
	Marianna	VERES	Hungarian Anti Poverty Network
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	James	MCKEON	EAPN Ireland
	Joan	COURTNEY	EAPN Ireland
	Annie Mary	CONNORS	EAPN Ireland
	Olga	DUBYNA	EAPN Ireland
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	Mirko	GRGA	Cooperative Ermes
	Sabrina	EMILIO	A.S.C. Europa
	Giuseppe	BATTAGLIA	Cooperative Arcobaleno
	Marco	ALIOTTA	Caritas Trieste
<b>Latvia</b>	Elina	ALERE	SKALBES EAPN
	Lasma	KRONBERGA	Veclaicenes Avotins
	Anita	INDRIKSONE	Pinki Community
<b>Lithuania</b>	Vaida	BARANAUSKAITE	Baltic Foundation HPI
	Zenonas	ANUSUSKAS	Eiciunai Community Center
	Gema	LAUKEVICIENE	Lithuanian Red Cross
	Janina	BREINEIZERIENE	"My Guru" project of social support
<b>Luxemburg</b>	Mireille	CONRATH	Päerd's Atelier ASBL
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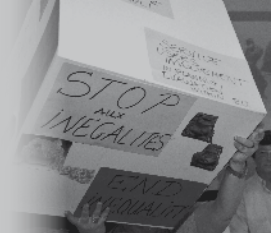
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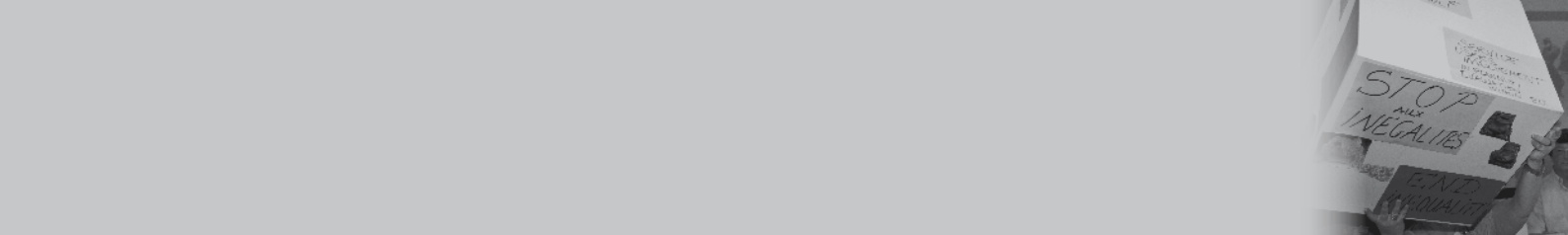
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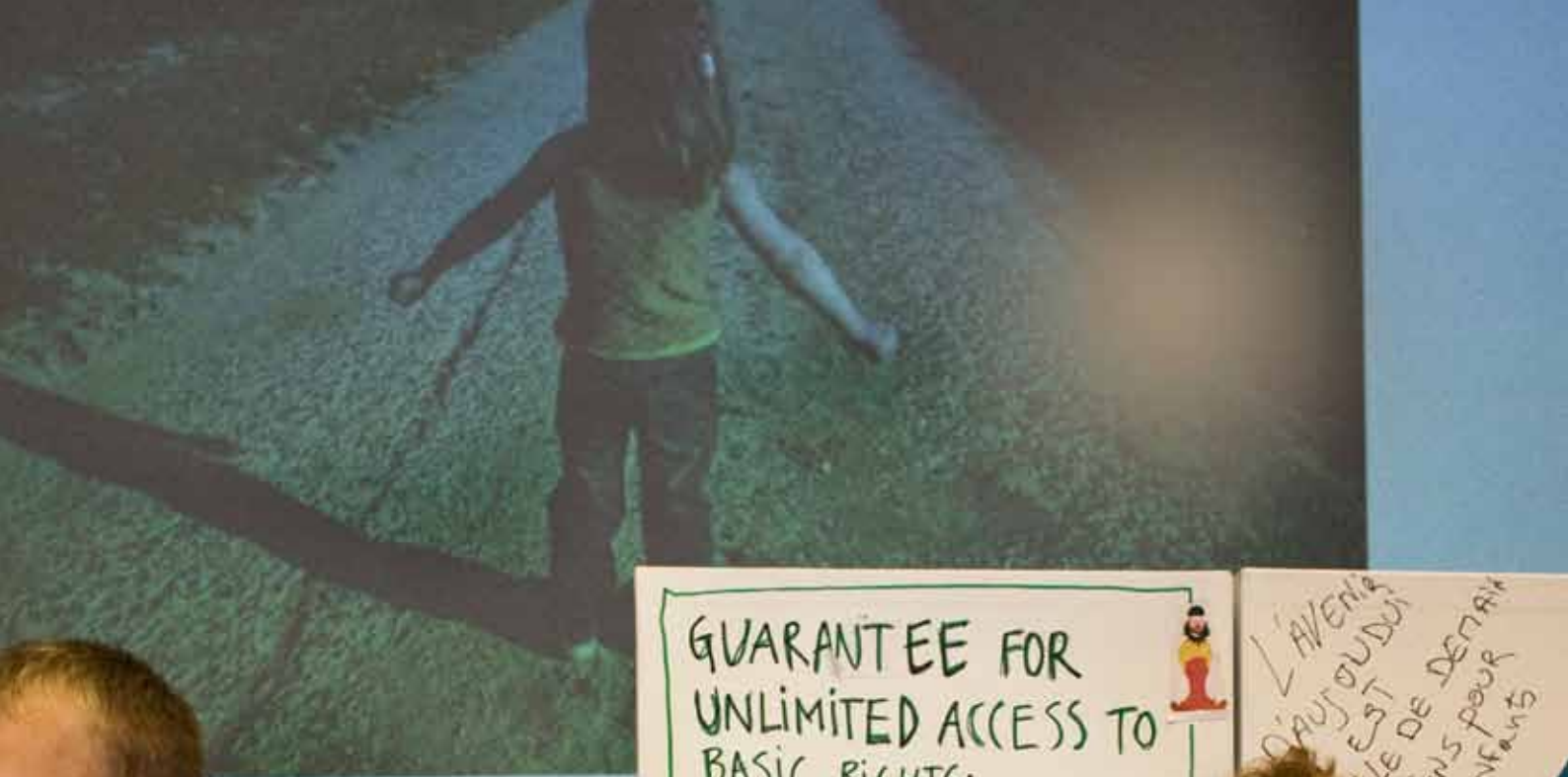




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OF PEOPLE  
6 JUNE

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- HOUSING  EMPLOYMENT
- EDUCATION  ...
- HEALTH  ...
- CULTURE
- MINIMUM INCOME



L'AVENIR  
D'AUTOUR D'UN  
LE DE DENT  
MILIONS POUR  
ENFANTS

## A minimum income for dignified li



## PROM RESPO



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ACCOUNTABILITY

BASIC RIGHTS:

- HOUSING
- EDUCATION
- HEALTH
- CULTURE
- MINIMUM INCOME



EMPLOYMENT



...



NETWORK

A minimum-income for a dignified life. 😊



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