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# Let's tackle in-work poverty!

16<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty

9-10 November 2017



## WHAT'S INSIDE?

FOREWORD .....	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	6
SETTING THE SCENE.....	8
OPENING PLENARY.....	10
OPEN SPACES.....	13
1. Homelessness and youth in poverty.....	15
2. In-work poverty and rural issues.....	16
3. Gender pay gap.....	17
4. Social welfare.....	18
5. Youth and in-work poverty.....	19
6. Migrants, refugees and in-work poverty.....	20
7. Education for rich and poor.....	22
8. The power to change policies.....	23
9. Ageing (50+) and in-work poverty.....	24
10. Adequate minimum wage for quality jobs.....	25
Come and hear my story!.....	27
VISIBILITY ACTION.....	29
THE DIALOGUE.....	31
FURTHER READING.....	37



People should work for a decent life, not for a life only for work!



Provide adequate social security for those who cannot work for one reason or the other.



Recognise CARERS of loved ones as ALREADY being in-work and pay them accordingly!

In-work Poverty is unacceptable= Pay a Living Wage



Understand that Working is not always a route out of poverty for people living with mental illness in rural communities.



Take away structures in society that prevents people to work.



All human beings have the same value



Real control in work to stop abuse is a MUST!

We work to live  
We don't live to work



A society that works for inclusion is sustainable.



People should work for a decent life, not for a life only for work!



WORK FOR HUMAN,  
HUMAN NOT FOR WORK



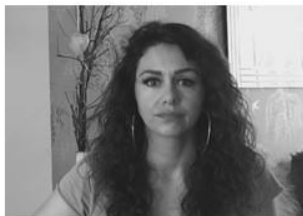
STOP PROFITING FROM POVERTY



TIME FOR 6 HOURS WORK DAY



Job and human precariousness deserve a deep appreciation. The weaker categories collide with a reality which is far from today's policy making. At #Pep2017 I'm looking for clear and sensible solutions



Social Inclusion does not mean getting out of poverty with welfare. It means taking notice of new and cross-cutting dimensions of social discomfort. It means fostering the transformation of services so that they can "go to" the citizens.



A fair and solidarity-based taxation system for working people!



Work should be a great joy and it is still for many torment, torment not to have it, torment to do a job that does not serve, not to a noble purpose (A. Olivetti)



Fight poverty, not the poor!



All my efforts goes for a world of equality, especially for women, children and elderly people.

## FOREWORD

In-work poverty is not an isolated problem, nor is it a new phenomenon caused by increasing use of non-standard employment emerging out of the financial crisis. It is an unacceptable feature of the employment landscape affecting up to 10 % of Europe's working households.

A major priority of the Europe 2020 strategy is to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 20 million, compared to 2008 levels. Investing in skills, modern labour markets, training, and adequate social protection systems are among the measures employed to reach this goal. But simply getting those who **can** work to do so is not always enough to lift them out of poverty, and the institutional focus on full employment has not led to meaningful progress on the poverty-reduction target. This is largely because the European Union has not recognised that the economic paradigm our institutions have been implementing for the last 30 years - and insisting on defending - is not able to effectively and fairly redistribute income and wealth and invest in quality jobs, services and social protection for all. Quality and sustainable jobs will be available only when a fair economy, at the service of people, is the leading priority for our societies. But Europe has to go further than jobs - quality services, social protection and minimum income, as recognised in the European Pillar of Social Rights, are all crucial elements in the fight against poverty. The kind of growth our societies are promoting is not serving the objectives of the European Union: **peace, well-being of European citizens, social justice and social cohesion.**

This is one of the reasons why the European Pillar of Social Rights can be an opportunity for a turning point, explicitly referring to in-work poverty and the importance of ensuring "adequate minimum wages," but also the right to an adequate income.

The theme of this years' People Experiencing Poverty (PeP) meeting is a timely reminder that in-work poverty must be tackled on many fronts, through direct and indirect measures and policies as part of the European Union's wider poverty reduction goals. The meeting is a unique platform bringing local, national and EU decision-makers together with people who have direct experience of poverty, empowering them to play a more active role in relevant policy processes at all levels. These meetings have been running for almost 20 years, and are a crucial part of the European democratic project, providing a meaningful avenue for participation of those who have been left behind by our current economic model. It is crucial that we preserve such spaces, such avenues for participation, for the sake of the democratic legitimacy of the European project.

The challenge is to monitor the impact of initiatives like the European Pillar of Social Rights at the EU and national level, and to ensure they make a meaningful contribution to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion.



Sérgio Aires  
 EAPN President



Leo Williams  
 EAPN Director



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 16<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, held on 9-10 November in the MCE Conference & Business Centre, Brussels, was organised by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) with the support of the European Commission and the EAPN Fund. Among the 120 participants were national delegations of EAPN members from 30 countries, (which included experts with experience of in-work poverty), representatives from civil society and trade unions, delegates from the European Parliament and Commission, Permanent Representatives, the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Marianne Thyssen, and the Belgian government.

The theme of this edition was **In-Work Poverty**, and the event was programmed towards sharing experiences and promoting open dialogue, especially among EAPN members with direct experience of poverty. A new venue and experimental programme provided what one delegate described as **open spaces that empower people**. The main auditorium was arranged in a flat hemicycle style with layered chairs facing the panel, which created an intimate and open atmosphere that facilitated interaction between speakers and the audience. The opening plenary started with a short account of four personal stories of in-work poverty, which set the scene and established the meeting as a **gathering of the people for the people**.

Commissioner Thyssen offered encouragement to EAPN and the delegations, while presenting the EU's actions and core elements of the European Social Pillar of Rights. Open space workshops were then organised so delegates could shape the main proceedings of the event, leading to **ten working themes, 30 key messages and a series of poignant questions** posed to the panel of the closing dialogue session on day two. Panel members included Esther Lynch, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, Bert D'Hondt, Belgian Government Advisor on Poverty, Family & Social Policy, and Stefan Olsson, Director for Employment, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

EAPN Director Leo Williams and President Sérgio Aires moderated proceedings alongside EAPN colleagues and volunteers who made sure everything went to plan, including the more 'fluid' activities such as the 'Come and hear my story!' session and Visibility Action at Place Flagey in Brussels, which saw delegates holding images and placards in support of the working poor.



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The **'top ten' key messages** defined and refined during the open space working groups, and voted on in the plenary session, were:

- 📍 **In many countries there is a huge need for adequate social protection, access to understandable information, organizations to which people can turn for help and social support, and more client orientated services**
- 📍 **We must invest in people-centred services (rights, access) before profit**
- 📍 **We need binding and collective wage agreements, regardless of gender**
- 📍 **We need transferability of social rights across borders, linked to a European Social Security Number (e.g. people living in border areas)**
- 📍 **We must inform young people of their working rights, and empower them to stand up for these rights**
- 📍 **We must combat and punish those who profit from the exploitation of migrants**
- 📍 **We need free, lifelong education for all**
- 📍 **We must broaden minds by making education about politics, power and society a compulsory part of educational systems**
- 📍 **We must promote non-discrimination in access to employment for over 50s**
- 📍 **We must reorganise labour markets to promote growth based on quality jobs, adequate minimum wage and dignity!**

## SETTING THE SCENE

As Europe edges itself out of nearly a decade of economic turmoil, it is tempting to declare that our problems will soon disappear, that employment will continue to pick up and poverty will naturally go down. But over-simplified equations like this ignore a much more persistent problem - **in-work poverty**.



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According to the 2017 Eurofound<sup>1</sup> report 'In-work poverty in the EU', which examines what countries have done to combat the problem since the financial crisis of 2008, the number of European workers at risk of poverty has increased from 8% in 2007 to 10% today.

Evidence also points to an increase in what is described as 'non-standard' forms of employment in many countries, adding to the reported growth in 'working poor' numbers. Tackling in-work poverty is "complicated by the policy focus on employment as a route out of poverty", notes the report, which underplays the "considerable financial, social and personal difficulties experienced by the working poor".



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What are the main causes then? Low hourly rates and inflexible working schedules are obvious causes, and often go hand-in-hand with poor housing, difficulties meeting childcare costs, disability, stress and failing health. Low work intensity is another cause of in-work poverty leading to job insecurity. A third and perhaps lesser-known cause is rising household costs, especially among families with more dependent children and relatives.

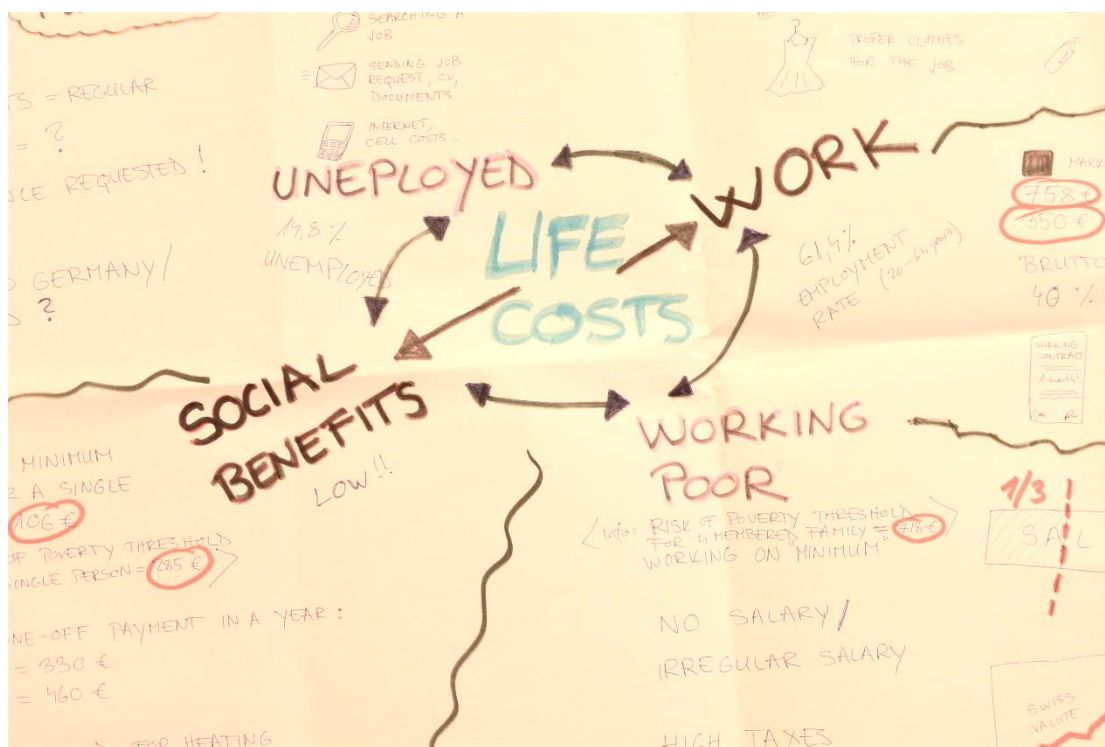
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2017/in-work-poverty-in-the-eu>



Governments, employers and social partners thus face the added challenge of coming up with policies and actions to address a problem with myriad causes and effects. This means a combination of direct measures, such as the minimum and living wage, progressive taxation, in-work benefits and social assistance, as well as indirect measures including more flexible working arrangements, childcare, housing support, and ways to boost skills, training and mobility.

**In-work poverty** describes a situation when household income is below the poverty line or threshold despite a full or part-time worker residing there. The poverty threshold is defined as 60% of the average household income (before housing costs).

Based on Employability in Scotland definition



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*'In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of.'*

**(Confucius quote selected by a delegate to the meeting)**

## OPENING PLENARY

**'A person who has a job must be proud of being able to work, earn money and live in dignity.'** **'Poverty is not a blame issue – it's [a] human rights violation!'** **'It's time to reverse the unfair distribution of resources...'** A wall of thought-provoking messages like these, from the participants, greeted the 120 delegates attending the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty (PeP) opening plenary.

Household income is on the rise, unemployment is at its lowest (7.6 %) since the financial crisis started in 2008, and European economies are predicting further growth in 2018. And yet, nearly a quarter of the EU population is at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion. For all the talk of better jobs and new opportunities, the reality for legions of Europe's working poor is far more stark.



(C) European Union, 2017

'Growth is back, but poverty remains,' said Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility. Non-standard, temporary and part-time jobs are fuelling in-work poverty. 'We must offer protection... from the winds of social and economic change,' she stressed. Investing in people and protecting them from hardship is at the heart of the European Pillar of Social Rights covering equal opportunities, access to

the labour market and social protection. The Pillar functions as a guide to policies that make the biggest difference on the ground, such as lifelong learning and boosting digital and numeracy skills – priorities for protecting the most vulnerable in times of flux, as well as action to raise wages and strengthen employment contracts and conditions. 'The times they are a changing,' said the Commissioner, citing Bob Dylan, and

10



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it is everyone's job – the Commission, Member States social partners, civil society and people in poverty – 'to make sure things change for the better and no one gets left behind or pushed aside' in this changing world.

The European Anti-Poverty Network’s Director, Leo Williams, said ‘we live in a world of plenty but wealth is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands’. This ‘paradox’ is amplified by the highly publicised Paradise Papers tax-avoidance scandal. He remarked that Commissioner Thyssen’s continued presence at the PeP Meeting is a testament to how seriously the EU takes the issue of in-work poverty, and the importance of actions to address it. The floor was then handed over to the four special guests whose stories of hardship painted a moving picture of what European citizens are facing on a daily basis.

***A changing world where no one gets left behind...*** Europe’s economy is showing signs of recovery, yet one in ten Europeans are still at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and nearly a quarter of the population are considered ‘working poor’, according to the latest Eurostat figures. The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) throws much-needed light on the ‘human’ stories and key messages behind these numbers.

**Karwan Tafik**, an Iraqi now living in **Sweden**, spoke about the plight of refugees struggling to integrate and the long waits for residency and permission to work legally in the country. He recounted the health problems, stress, racism and isolation he and other refugees experience, which would be alleviated if waiting times were reduced and they were allowed to learn Swedish and earn a decent living faster.

**Kerrie Friel from Scotland** is a single mother of four who became an activist after growing tired of ‘treading water’ and struggling to end the sense of social exclusion faced by sole parents in poverty. ‘People want to be cared for not criticised’ by a society that respects not rejects them, she said. ‘We really want justice not judgement.’

**Cidália Barriga** lives with her husband and three children in **Portugal**. She works part time and her husband full time, and yet still struggles to make ends meet. The family’s health is suffering and she worries about her children’s future. ‘I want work and stability... to be able to live not only survive,’ she said.



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**Gabriela Gaidampas from Romania** works in social services and, with her meagre salary and high rent, can’t afford to start a family. She would like to see governments provide a better balance between wages and prices, so people like her are motivated to work and can afford important services to improve quality of life.

Recapping the meeting’s mission, EAPN President Sérgio Aires said the PeP Meeting is a true exercise in democracy and participation because it takes the voices of working poor seriously and communicates their messages to all levels of government. That in-work poverty exists is a sign of a model that needs reviewing, he said: ‘Any form of poverty is a

sign of democracy in crisis.’ Here, the integrated approach of the Social Pillar in dealing with this challenge is welcomed, but he sees potential for more input and feedback from national initiatives already under way to be included. ‘The recovery we’re witnessing is not happening in all Member States the same way or in the same direction’, he concluded, especially where wealth is concentrated in fewer hands.

**Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth ...** On 17 November 2017, the European Union held its first summit dedicated to social issues in two decades. At the summit in Sweden, Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament proclaimed their support for the European Pillar of Social Rights covering such things as the right to education, training and lifelong learning; access to social protection, housing and essential services; the right to a minimum income, fair wages, decent living standards, and old-age pensions; and many others. [www.government.se/government-policy/social-summit-for-fair-jobs-and-growth](http://www.government.se/government-policy/social-summit-for-fair-jobs-and-growth)

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## OPEN SPACES



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The open space method derives its name from the open way in which members of a group participate and stand up for things they care about using the **law of two feet**, literally moving or walking to wherever they can best contribute and/or learn. An increasingly popular medium for promoting dialogue and ‘community planning’,

open space workshops enable a group of people to create their own discussion points, under a specific theme – in this case, in work-poverty. The self-organising nature and collective activities release the inherent creativity and leadership in people.

### Basic principles guiding the open space:

*Whoever comes is the right person*

*Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened*

*Whenever it starts is the right time and when it's over it's over*

After the plenary on 9 November, delegates broke out into a series of parallel workshops taking place throughout the venue. The ‘agenda wall’ captured the pressing issues and themes people experiencing poverty, in particular the working poor, face today, and which would be discussed in groups.

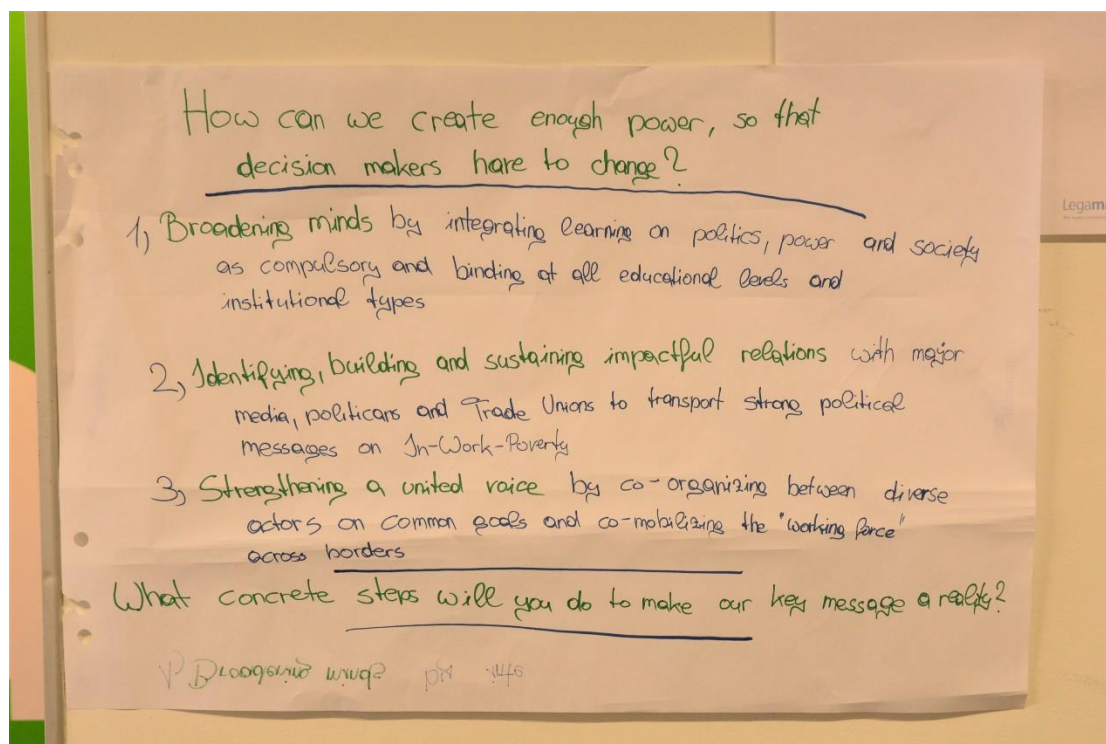


(C) European Union, 2017

**The ten themes were:**

1. Homelessness and youth in poverty
2. In-work poverty and rural issues
3. Gender pay gap
4. Social welfare
5. Youth and in-work poverty
6. Migrants, refugees and in-work poverty
7. Education for rich and poor
8. The power to change policies
9. Ageing (50+) and in-work poverty
10. Adequate minimum wage for quality jobs

The discussions and outcomes of the open space exercise were posted on the walls of the venue and kept safe ready for presenting first thing on day two of the PeP Meeting.



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Details of the group discussions are provided in the following pages of this report, alongside key messages, moments and questions. One key message, highlighted in green each time below, was chosen to be presented to the panel the next day.

# 1. Homelessness and youth in poverty

A mixed group from different backgrounds sharing their common experiences of homelessness. Being homeless also means living in a hostel or shelter, they stressed. Securing a well-paid job is the key to ending homelessness and life-long poverty, but it is a challenge for young people entering the labour market. And providing quality and affordable housing is just the first step on the road out of poverty; services and support are also needed.

## Three key messages, one burning question...

1. Young people in particular face a huge challenge with student debts (education costs)
2. Homeless people can have a paid job - but because of in-work poverty they cannot afford to pay rent and are living on the street. We demand adequately paid jobs.
3. In many countries there is a huge need for adequate social protection, access to understandable information, organizations to which people can turn for help and social support; and more client orientated services.

*In what way can we, as EAPN, help/support the Commission to make the Social Pillar work and bring an end to in-work poverty, changing it into the right to social justice? Can ESF be opened up for organisations like EAPN to identify target groups like homeless and young people experiencing in-work poverty?*

## Top moments and take-homes...

Homelessness doesn't necessarily mean living on the streets or being out of work completely... a clearer definition is needed

Youngsters face poor prospects of a secure job and ever gaining access to services or entering the housing market

More stable shelters and services for homeless women are needed

Better access to social systems, support organisations and self-help groups is vital

## Key quotes ...

*'The difficulty of finding a job is leading to continued further education to improve young people's chances on the labour market, which results in debt...'*

*'People with addiction are often banned from more permanent shelters...'*

*'When you start to respect people, you will save money!'*

EAPN member FEANTSA has developed ETHOS, the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, in order to provide a common framework through which to discuss homelessness. It attempts to cover all living situations which amount to homelessness or housing exclusion:

- **rooflessness** (without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough)
- **houselessness** (with a place to sleep but temporary in institutions or shelter)
- **living in insecure housing** (threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence)
- **living in inadequate housing** (in caravans on illegal campsites, in unfit housing, in extreme overcrowding).

ETHOS has been translated into most EU languages and is being used and accepted by more and more governments, researchers and organisations throughout Europe.

See more at: [www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2015/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion?bcParent=27](http://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2015/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion?bcParent=27)

## 2. In-work poverty and rural issues

A small, solution-focused group heard experiences from different European regions and rural conditions. In Hungary, for example, inherited poverty is a major challenge. In Romania, health, education and ageing rural populations are big issues: 60 % of farmers are at risk of poverty, and 4 million people are working abroad. While in Scotland (UK), services and support are focused on urban poverty, largely ignoring rural communities and islands.

### Three key messages, one burning question...

1. We must invest in people-centred services (rights, access) before profit
2. Strengthen community and individual activism on rights (social and human)
3. Make technology an engine for social change

*How can the EU harness the potential of technology to ensure that the services needed to overcome poverty in rural areas are sustainable, adequate and community and people centered?*

### Top moments and take-homes...

New technology, ideas and cooperation are needed to improve subsistence farming

Poverty-proofing tools need to be introduced at all levels of policymaking and delivery

Shared taxis and innovative rural transport solutions are needed; it should be a public service not a business...



Poor housing and 'fuel poverty' are a big rural concern; renewable energy needs to be more widely available

There is less work in the East and often young people can't move for work because they are caring for elderly parents

**Key quotes ...**

*'Poor services in rural areas make it hard to access childcare, education, and health... services are centralised, top-down and profit driven... few doctors want to work in small villages...'*

*'The model of services is the key: it's not just business but a social good...'*

*'Small rural employers are afraid to risk taking on people with disabilities or mental health problems...'*

*'In-work poverty means always having to check prices in supermarkets, not being able to buy a round of drinks...'*

### 3. Gender pay gap

A small, well-informed and cooperative group whose different experiences spoke to the range of gender issues at play. These included the glass ceiling on management positions (and higher pay), a culture of intimidation preventing women from standing up for their rights, lack of information on those rights, difficulties faced by single parents (mostly women) and the work-life balance, and the need for affirmative action, to name a few raised.

**Three key messages, one burning question...**

1. We need binding and collective wage agreements, regardless of gender
2. Develop and protect the status of informal carers (pension systems)
3. We need fixed and transparent qualification standards

*How can we get women out of the gender gap and out of poverty?*

**Top moments and take-homes...**

Better networking and confidence training is needed to empower women to claim better wages

Trade union involvement and awareness-raising are important to tackle gender pay gap issues and collective bargaining

Affirmative action is needed in recruitment to counterbalance prejudices that women are not as committed to their jobs as men (family responsibilities)

Tailor wages to qualifications and achievements (i.e. women are often better educated today) and address industries with a traditional male dominated workforce (i.e. science and technology)

### Key quotes ...

*'Cultural constraints undermine women's confidence and make them believe that somehow they are worth less...'*

*'The reasons behind the gender pay gap go well beyond the mere presence of women in power-yielding position...'*

*There is an informal EAPN 'Gender and Poverty' Group linked to the EU Inclusion Strategies Group working on these issues. If you would like to be involved in this group, please contact Graciela Malgesini from EAPN Spain on [graciela.malgesini@eapn.es](mailto:graciela.malgesini@eapn.es)*

## 4. Social welfare

Intense discussions focused on topics chosen by the group, with all members given a chance to present their story and perspective, from the struggles of disability in Sweden and bureaucracy in cross-border pension schemes between Germany and Denmark, to workforce-related issues and the need for common standards and less complications in a more 'human' system.

### Three key messages, one burning question...

1. We need transferability of social rights across borders, linked to a European Social Security Number
2. Common standards for capability/disability assessment
3. The system should encourage and support adequate wages, and provide sufficient resources for those who cannot work

*Is it justifiable to doom a person to poverty for life for the sole reason of being disabled?*

### Top moments and take-homes...

More information is needed on the differences between Member States in handling social welfare and the rights and obligations for cross-border workers

The assessment of disability is taken out of context and needs to be improved; people with less visible disability like mental illnesses are more exposed than those with visible disability

Welfare and tax systems should be simplified and encourage people to work as much as they can, not discourage those with disabilities, for example

**Key quotes ...**

*'My dream is for Europe to agree on the same system of assessing pension and for people who have to rely on pensions to be able to live a dignified life...'*

*'Instead of saying minimum wage, we should say 'adequate' wage; we need money to live, not just to survive...'*

*'We need people to make decisions in favour of those who are falling through the cracks...'*

*EAPN is working on the issues of the social welfare systems through their "EU Inclusion Strategies Group" (contact [sian.jones@eapn.eu](mailto:sian.jones@eapn.eu)) and through the [European Minimum Income Network](#) (contact [fintan.farrell@eapn.eu](mailto:fintan.farrell@eapn.eu))*

## 5. Youth and in-work poverty

An enthusiastic group covered a lot of territory, including how young people struggle to find and secure work in Serbia, Bulgaria, and virtually everywhere in Europe, and the gap between education and the labour market. The group explored how young people are trapped in low- and unpaid work, or informal and non-standard positions forcing them to stay at home, continue studying (and building up debts), and to put their life and future on hold.

**Three key messages, one burning question...**

1. We must inform young people of their working rights, and empower them to stand up for these rights
2. Increase and equalise the minimum salary for a decent life
3. Build and strengthen coalitions between different social partners

*How can we include and give power/recognition to young people in the decision-making process related to the issues that influence them directly?*

**Top moments and take-homes...**

The education system needs to be better regulated and financed, and unpaid internships stopped

Studies are needed on labour market trends and opportunities to guide young people's education choices

More sustainable measures (tax, incentives, transparency) for employers to create decently paid jobs for young people

Better inform young people about their workers' rights and how trade unions can help

Propose a common and decent minimum wage for all people

The European Social Fund should further target youth to reduce in-work poverty

### Key quotes ...

*'Young people are living with their parents for a very long time due to (in-work) poverty...'*

*'The general population has prejudices that poor people are lazy...'*

*'Young people are putting off starting families because they have no job, a low-paid job or they work under precarious conditions...'*

EAPN developed a position paper on [Youth Poverty and Social Exclusion in the EU](#). For further information on the work of EAPN on youth issues, contact Senior Policy Officer Amana Ferro on [amana.ferro@eapn.eu](mailto:amana.ferro@eapn.eu)

## 6. Migrants, refugees and in-work poverty

20

An earnest group discussed the complex relationship between poverty and migration with first-hand insights. Topics explored include the reasons for migration, difficulties they face on the move and once settled, prejudices and obstructions to better integration, problems of language and red tape, different treatment and rights



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in EU countries depending on status (refugee, migrant, asylum-seeker, etc.), and the struggles of living on the fringe of society with no voice.

### Three key messages, one burning question...

1. We must combat and punish those who profit from the exploitation of migrants
2. Europe should see immigration as an opportunity not a problem
3. EU should help economically poorer Member States and involve migrants in implementing projects

**Plus one...**

Europe needs a common policy for the inclusion of refugees and migrants

*How can we integrate the skills of migrants/refugees into the labour market?*

### Top moments and take-homes...

Better and faster integration (e.g. learning the language, culture, laws, procedures) is key to social justice and helping migrants avoid a cycle of long-term poverty

Identify capacities and skills of migrants to match them to jobs, recognising diplomas and qualifications

The first hurdle for migrants is to get papers, healthcare and a decent living; processes need to be simplified and expedited, otherwise integration is difficult

Social dumping and unfair competition are big issues, also in the context of equal pay for immigrants

### Key quotes ...

*'Immigration caused by globalisation, capitalism, dictatorships... these are dramatic situations with people becoming poorer and more vulnerable...'*

*'Human rights and solidarity are important in this very complex issue...'*

*'Politicians should stop making migrants feel guilty... and punish people profiting from migration!'*

*EAPN's Task Force on Migration has been working on these issues. For details of the work of the Task Force, contact Sian Jones, EAPN Policy Coordinator, on [sian.jones@eapn.eu](mailto:sian.jones@eapn.eu)*

## 7. Education for rich and poor

The group discussed the growing sense of distrust of institutions and the need for solidarity between rich and poor, implying the need for a better balance between economic, political and social imperatives like education, culture but also wealth distribution.

### Three key messages, one burning question...

1. We need free, lifelong education for all
2. Two teachers in every classroom (a professional and trainee) at all times
3. Extra support for children from poor families

*How can a school system support not only poor children but also families living in poverty?*

### Top moments and take-homes...

It is important to define what education is and means to society: it means a 'state of being ready for continuous learning and ready for life', which is why more teachers are always needed

In the wake of the Paradise Papers revelation, there is a sense of 'us versus them'; European people against big business

Ban tax havens, punish people who put money into them and develop a European directive that gets them to put money into the educational system instead

The educational and cultural sector has to be revalued and framed in terms of current issues like tax evasion, debt collectors, student loans and their consequences on education

### Key quotes ...

*'Education is the cheapest way to peace...'*

*'The main problem is that classes are overcrowded and teachers can't control them...'*

*'Provide more individual support for pupils and strengthen relationships between teachers and students...'*

## 8. The power to change policies

A balanced debate by a group of mostly northern and central Europeans, the key issues included the current political apathy and poor awareness in Europe, the issue of big business and wealth distribution, the need for better education, and more engagement with and by politicians, especially to reach young people and migrants who can't or don't vote, and the call for greater involvement by trade unions, activists and individuals in decision-making (at local, national and EU level).

### Three key messages, one burning question...

1. Broaden minds through political education and engagement in all institutions
2. Identify, build and sustain relations with trade unions, politicians and mass media to reach people and influence decisions
3. Strengthen our united voice by co-organizing between diverse actors on common goals and mobilize the "working force" across borders.

*What concrete steps will you take to make our key messages a reality?*

### Top moments and take-homes...

Politics cannot be trusted to make the necessary changes, so how can we create the power in society needed to press for change?

Trade unions can map out necessary changes in whole sectors, so politicians need to support the unions, attracting media attention to in-work poverty and social issues

Explain the importance of political activism and invite political leaders to participate in planned action, with clear guidelines on what is expected of them

Being part of a trade union needs to be incentivised, especially for the younger generation

Education, especially political studies, can change minds, raise awareness of social issues, and promote diverse views

### Key quotes ...

*'EU countries are not following up enough when it comes to social issues...'*

*'In a global society, we need to change mindsets against a constructed scarcity of resources...'*

*'Trade unions are the most important thing for the working class to come together...'*

*'From a poverty perspective... we need a collective voice...'*

## 9. Ageing (50+) and in-work poverty

A diverse group in terms of background, the discussion covered diverse topics reflecting the situations in each member's country, from chronic job insecurity in Portugal for young and old jobseekers, to the difficulties facing over-50s in Latvia (returning to school, taking on debt, disability, finding help), to the need for attitude change both by older jobseekers and companies who refuse to employ them, to the high unemployment numbers and hardship in Greece since the financial and migrant crisis.

### Three key messages, one burning question...

1. We must promote non-discrimination in access to employment for over 50s
2. Change tax policies for working poor over 50 (more progressive/fair systems)
3. Establish a social rating for companies in addition to financial rating

*Where is this issue being addressed within the European Pillar of Social Rights?*

### Top moments and take-homes...

A first step is for local, regional and EU authorities to admit that in-work poverty exists and that it affects the over-50s

Ageing populations in Europe mean that people are going to be working longer, yet companies don't have enough incentives (tax benefits, social rebates, etc.) to hire or keep over-50s on-board

More mentoring and pairing of older, more experienced, workers with younger trainees can help spread knowledge and keep experience within an organisation

Change the way of making policy in social and working affairs, promoting new values, apart from just earning more money

### Key quotes ...

*'Many women are stuck in a marriage they don't want to be in just for economic reasons...'*

*'People are thrown into any kind of job, sometimes with no minimum salary... and youngsters still dependent on them...'*

*'Companies should be compelled to care... people are sacrificed to the benefit of economics...'*



EAPN's member, AGE Platform, works exclusively on these issues. Find more information on their work at their website: <http://www.age-platform.eu/>

## 10. Adequate minimum wage for quality jobs

This focused group quickly drilled down to the key issues which included defining the current interpretation of minimum wage and the basket of goods and services that it should be able to cover. They called for better measures to protect workers, tackle temping agencies, stimulate entrepreneurship, control social security, and a tax regime that more equitably redirects wealth and resources.

### Three key messages, one burning question

1. We must reorganise labour markets to promote growth based on quality jobs, adequate minimum wage and dignity!
2. We are worth more than the banks (promote a fair and inclusive labour market)!
3. Redistribution or revolution... you decide!

*What will be the next concrete step to achieve a minimum wage in dignity?*

### Top moments and take-homes...

Set a higher European minimum wage linked to the consumer price index (more than the 60 % median!)

Balance tax, social and economic policies to make them more progressive (higher for the rich, lower for the poor) to better redistribute resources and wealth

Larger local government role in regulating employment contracts in cooperation with trade unions

Better control over social security and more incentives for SMEs and entrepreneurship is also desirable

### Key quotes ...

*'Tackle the wage gap between CEOs and workers!'*

*'Temporary job agencies must be abolished!'*

*EAPN has been running an awareness raising campaign on Living Wages since 2015, which includes an in-depth Background Note, a Campaign Guide, logo, a 2-pager explaining our demands, an interactive [Facebook page](#), and a Twitter hashtag (#EAPNWage). See more information [here](#), or contact Amana Ferro, Senior Policy Officer, on [amana.ferro@eapn.eu](mailto:amana.ferro@eapn.eu)*

*\*NOTE: More detailed notes on the ten workshops at the PeP Meeting 2017 are available on request: contact [magda.tancau@eapn.eu](mailto:magda.tancau@eapn.eu)*

## Come and hear my story!

A special session was organised to encourage delegates to open up and tell their moving stories in their own way. It started with a casual meet-and-greet in the lobby (poster area) and moved upstairs to three dedicated rooms where national delegations invited everyone to learn about life for the working poor in their countries which morphed into a 'living book' of presentations, reports, recitals, films and more.

The following photo-caption section gives a flavour of the events and activities.

### SWEDEN



© EAPN Sweden

*Elina, a 20-year-old job-seeker, presents a moving silent tribute to the energy-sapping struggles she faces in reaching her goals.*

### NETHERLANDS



© EAPN Netherlands

*In this telling report, aired on Dutch national channel NOS, homeless youths-turned-activists tell their story as they counsel young people currently living on the streets.*

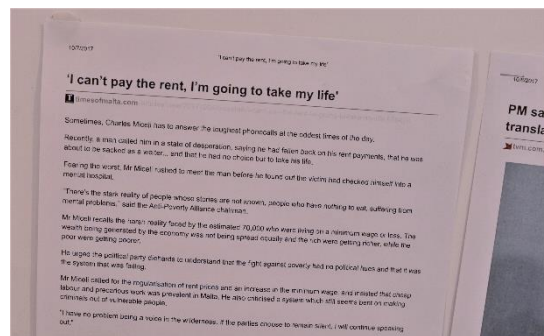
### PORTUGAL



© Christian Nielsen

*A hard-hitting but catchy message by the Portuguese delegation during the PeP Meeting: 'Wear dignity... Undress precariousness'.*

### MALTA



© Rebecca Lee/EAPN

*'People earning the minimum wage are literally hitting rock bottom!' Insights from interviews and accounts of what it means to be poor in Malta.*

## AUSTRIA



© Rebecca Lee/EAPN

*Theatre of life: for the working poor of Austria the drama of everyday life means multiple low-paid jobs, mounting bills, failing health and sheer exhaustion.*

## POLAND



© EAPN Poland

*A new minimum wage in Poland means very little to 64-year-old Pawel, an unemployed journalist living in a hostel with other homeless people, both young and old.*

## ICELAND



© Rebecca Lee/EAPN

*Heartfelt presentation puts Iceland's soaring cost of living into perspective. The cheapest two-bed flat in Reykjavik is €1 690... 'Who can afford that on a minimum wage?'*

## FRANCE



© Rebecca Lee/EAPN

*Unfolding drama of making ends meet in France. Rent? Food? Entertainment? Clothing? Schools? Utility bills? Transport? Medical costs? Taxes? 'I'm not a poor worker... I'm a good worker!'*

## VISIBILITY ACTION

Over 100 participants gathered in Place Flagey, holding photos and slogans about in-work poverty, in a 'silent exhibition', aiming to:

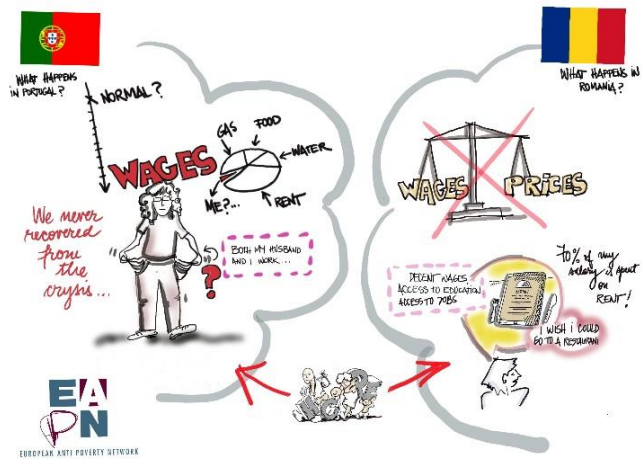
- Achieve visibility of the Meeting and its outcomes
- Raise awareness of the Belgian public on the existence of in-work poverty throughout Europe and the importance of the fight against poverty and social exclusion
- Create an active moment where participants can express themselves in the public sphere



## DECIDING THE KEY MESSAGES

There was an air of positive expectation in the main room, as delegates filed in for day two of the PeP event. On the wall, animated drawings summed up the previous day's activities and two national delegates gave their heartfelt accounts of life on the social margins.

A Belgian delegate summed up the atmosphere, saying that the open spaces initiative 'opened minds' and generated a strong spirit of community among delegates present. 'The freedom to choose the topics that guided discussions,' he said, was refreshing and led to 'high-quality contributions and a shared appreciation of the process'. It created a 'yes we can' attitude which inspired the key messages that followed.



© Andreea Buzec/Visual Architects Romania

A Croatian delegate said he had spent a 'wonderful three days' sharing experiences with people facing similar challenges in their countries. He mentioned specific problems in Croatia concerning the banks, finance and a broken political system that struggles to prevent homelessness. 'I am homeless and I'm trying to get out of the shelter,' he said, but it's hard when you don't have enough money and suffer from poor health. 'My salary of €350 is just not enough!'

Two people from each of the ten open space workshop groups were invited to present their results. Delegates were then called on to nominate **one key message** for each workshop, to stimulate the dialogue later in the morning.

## THE DIALOGUE

Leading up to the dialogue session, EAPN Director Leo Williams expressed his frustration at an **'absurd system'** that fails to provide a living wage to hard workers. A system that allows the rich and corporations to avoid tax with impunity, robbing the workers of the world of a dignified existence. He said the past two days at the PeP Meeting was a manifestation of the values of democracy and participation, which is at the heart of what the EAPN does, and what it seeks to promote through EU and national political dialogue.

The dialogue commenced with contributions from two national delegates. Astrid Kirschsteiger, from EAPN Austria, a single mother of four in Austria said she was grateful to have the opportunity to contribute to the key messages presented to the panel, and to speak about the need for working contracts, in particular. José Antonio Ramirez Amor from EAPN Spain underlined the importance of the open space approach, which led to fruitful ideas and ultimately the synthesised messages.

The ten key messages chosen for the dialogue session were written on flip charts and presented by delegates to the whole assembly. They were 'just a taster' of the 30 messages and other ideas distilled from the working sessions on day one, Leo Williams pointed out, before asking how well they all chimed with the panel's thinking on the issues.



Esther Lynch, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, suggested they would provide food for thought on their contribution to the workings of the European Social Pillar next year. The Confederation's main priority is to increase wages by the 'hour,

week and month' so workers are sure to get a 'living wage' and secure working hours to avoid employers taking advantage of so-called 'flexible' labour and shifting costs onto workers. **'If the Pillar can't cover someone who wants to work and still can't cover their costs, it's not worth the paper it's written on,'** she said. Another focus is to stop 'management by fear' that sees people who stand up for their rights being picked on. She spoke of efforts to reach a minimum wage (60% of the median average) and an agreed percentage to be covered by collective agreements in each Member State, taking Sweden and Denmark as benchmarks (e.g. 60-70-80%). The Pillar also needs to gel with this and she enlisted the help of EAPN and all delegates to do their part to press it home during the all-important implementation phase.

Bert D'Hondt (CD&V), Advisor on Poverty, Family & Social Policy to the Belgian Government, said in-work poverty is often forgotten so events like the PeP Meeting are important. His government's strategy is to help people get a job, which is good for the economy but also good for them, to help them **'get out of poverty and build a decent life'**. He spoke about some



measures to achieve this and how Belgium is doing well but could

(C) European Union, 2017

always do more. **'We already have a relatively high minimum**

**wage of around €1 500, which is 25% over the poverty threshold,'** he said. There are also measures like income guarantees for involuntary part-time workers and a recent agreement to increase the tax-free sum for single parents at risk and part-time working parents, which is equivalent to an extra €1 000 cash in hand. But he said Belgium needs to address labour market rigidity as a stepping stone to better jobs. **'When you're in you're in, but when you're out it's difficult to enter,'** he said. And for this, they are looking at examples in Germany and Holland.

32

Stefan Olsson, Director for Employment, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion spoke first of the importance of events like PeP Meeting for gathering vital inputs that **'go beyond statistics'** by drawing on real experience. He called on EAPN and everyone present to fight hard to keep this sort of dialogue going, especially in tackling problems like in-work poverty. **'We need to break the myth that employment is enough,'** he said, and to make sure that policymakers are fully aware of it. Today, the richest 20% of the population earn five times more than the poorest 20%, and one in ten of working people are poor. This has grown from one in 12 in 2008. Clearly more needs to be done and the Social Pillar is a 'very interesting tool' for this, he said, but he echoed Esther Lynch view that the Pillar can't solve everything on its own... **'it needs action and implementation'**. The Pillar is all about **'what we can do together'** about minimum wages and other issues already on the table. With heads of state signing up to the Pillar at the Social Summit in November 2017, it validates the mandate, helps to secure future funding for things like collective bargaining and poverty issues and



**'makes everyone accountable'**. The European Commission is committed, he said, but it needs all actors on-board, and inputs from people experiencing poverty certainly feed into that process.

## Q&A

A Serbian delegate asked about an observed lack of trust in trade unions. Esther Lynch responded that people need to challenge employers, to **'show up, speak for the workers, get motions on the agenda'**, and through tireless effort **'you'll get there'**. She mentioned the East-West social dumping issue and how the ETUC plans to tackle this and minimum wage negotiations as part of the Written Statement Directive, legislation currently being proposed by the European Commission as a complement to the Social Pillar, aiming at stopping employers finding **'clever ways'** to avoid paying fair wages.

On a question of how to get the most out of technological developments in rural communities and for the environment, Stefan Olsson said the concrete experience of EAPN members of what works for poor people on the ground is highly valued. While Bert D'Hondt cautioned to not treat technology as a panacea of all that is good because it can sometimes exclude the most vulnerable. A balance of on- and off-line services is still needed to serve the widest possible constituency. Public and employment services are changing to accommodate people experience poverty, he remarked.

A German delegate told a touching story of how her pension had been eroded by illness and an inability to work, and the difficulty of dealing with cross-border rights for work she did in Denmark. **'Who stands up for me, a single woman who can't work due to health problems?'** she implored. **'I'm literally financially destroyed.'** Stefan Olsson said the rules and processes are complex but he was confident there is something that can be done about such problems. He explained about the Pillar's role in providing benchmarks for helping to simplify social welfare and on minimum wages, but these measures can't be imposed by the EU, he cautioned, so the effort goes into showing the benefits and learning from other Member States.

German and French delegates followed up on the minimum wage idea, asking what concrete steps can be taken and if a standard salary for all Member States is possible to deal with rising costs and inflation. Where minimum wages exist, the result is usually positive, suggested Stefan Olsson. On the idea of uniform salary and minimum wages, Esther Lynch said 'minimum' does not necessarily mean fair or adequate. She repeated that it should be no less than 60 % of the median salary Europe wide, and if you talk about 'fair' that means workers get a reasonable share of the 'supernatural' profit they help to



© Rebecca Lee/EAPN

create. The Pillar should get all Member States to sit down with trade unions and employees, so people can bargain for a fair wage, she said.

One last poignant question was asked by a delegate from Iceland: **'Is it justifiable to doom a person to poverty for the sole reason of being disabled?'**

**'No, it should not happen, but it does... even in Belgium,'** said Bert D'Hondt, who went on to explain what the government is doing to raise disability benefits and what is still needed. Stefan Olsson called for more care in determining who can and can't work, and what happens when people are 'forced' out of the system. He raised the issue of changing work patterns, new opportunities and challenges posed by technology, and how the social system needs to adapt to these new realities, so that no one falls between the gaps. These systems are like oil tankers, he said: **'It's hard to change their direction'**, but the Pillar is a step in the right direction towards access to social security for all.

Esther Lynch highlighted public procurement as a good starting point, and called for the Commission to give better guidance on procurement rules with targets to ensure people who are **'distant from the labour market'** are given a fair chance at winning contracts so that it does not always come down to the cheapest tender paying the lowest wages. A criterion for **'good companies'** who are making more effort in these areas would help, she suggested.

Leo Williams gave the panel a copy of the 'living book' put together for the PeP Meeting and called the dialogue to a close with a final question: **'If we're back here in two years' time, what would you like to see changed for in-work poverty?'**

One delegate said he would expect to see the EU putting a stop to modern slavery, and to see more inclusive employment (disabled, 50+, single mothers...). **'We want a Europe of dignity and inclusion,'** he said. Another national delegate said he would like to hear that many of the issues presented at PeP Meeting have been implemented, **'to get ideas and projects to the streets.'**

## CLOSING

The closing evaluation is an important feature of the event, as it helps the EAPN improve on what it is doing and to make events like the PeP Meeting more productive in future. Delegates were rallied to take part in a 'living' evaluation. Based on the 'law of two feet', they moved to a part of the main room, forming an imaginary line of 'highest to lowest' scores corresponding to a series of questions:

### 1. Do you feel the meeting has been empowering?

A good spread of delegates along the living line, but weighed mostly to the higher end. Those at the lower end were asked why they rated it lower. One person said the level of discussion was a little below her expertise and expectations, and that she would like to have seen more attention paid to certain issues. On the positive side, it was felt delegates had the chance to say what they wanted, and that there was distinct 'revolution' in the air.

### 2. Did you tackle questions important to you?

Again a similar spread along the line was weighted in favour of the event. Those on the lower end said the event didn't offer enough scope or time to answer big questions on the gender pay gap. On the plus-side, delegates said discussing immigration and labour markets was illuminating and brought the national policies to light in a European setting (same rights as all).



(c) Rebecca Lee/EAPN

### 3. Did you meet new people and exchange ideas?

A strong shift to the positive side of the living line, and everyone on that end of the spectrum was encouraged to discuss: What did you like best, what can be done better next time?

*'Open spaces all the way!'*

### People liked...

Open spaces were popular, especially the ability to choose the topics. **'Open spaces all the way,'** one delegate said, because it empowers people. The venue was also appreciated, and people liked that they were not separated by country but rather by topics or themes. One national delegation said their team met all of its objectives and thanked EAPN for making it possible.

### Suggestions...

More time for the last dialogue would be good next time, one delegate said, and more EC officials could join in on the open spaces. Not being separated by country groups and the open space method led to better topics: **'More of the same!'**, said a delegate. More breaks or time for preparations was requested; Meeting information could be sent more in advance to help panels and delegations prepare. Key messages need to be a bit more specific, and perhaps distinguish **'what can be done without extra money'**. One delegate said she didn't get to meet everyone and share something personal.

Raquel Cortés Herrera, Deputy Head of Unit "Disability & Inclusion", DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, closed out the PeP Meeting by thanking her team, EAPN and all delegates and contributors. **'I am really impressed with the commitment, creativity and wide range of topics... covering different sides of the problem,'** she said. Some of the key messages presented, including the gender pay gap, integrating immigrants, homelessness, etc., gel with Commission priorities, she added. **'We are glad that the outcome has been fruitful,'** she said, and feedback from the evaluation session helps the team improve future PeP Meetings, she noted.

EAPN Director Leo Williams then invited everyone to take part in a 'family photo', thanked the note-takers, volunteer interpreters, flying facilitators, graphic facilitator and rapporteurs.

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We are looking forward to the next People Experiencing Poverty Meeting in **Autumn 2018** and hope you can join us.

For the most up-to-date information, please check our webpage:  
<http://www.eapn.eu/voices-of-poverty/>



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## FURTHER READING

**To learn more about the European Anti-Poverty Network's actions to combat in-work poverty, consult the following links:**

European Anti-Poverty Network: [www.eapn.eu](http://www.eapn.eu)

Our work on [employment](#)

Our position paper on In-Work poverty: [Working and poor](#)

Our *Quality of Work & Employment in the EU* [Explainer](#)

Our position paper on Inclusive Labour Markets: [Building pathway approaches to quality employment](#)

Our [10 Principles on Quality Work](#)

Our awareness-raising action on [Living Wages](#)

Experience more *Voices from the Ground* on our webpage [here](#)

**For more information on the actions of the EU, consult the following:**

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion: [ec.europa.eu/social/home](http://ec.europa.eu/social/home)

European Pillar of Social Rights: [ec.europa.eu/social/pillar](http://ec.europa.eu/social/pillar)

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See all EAPN publications and activities on [www.eapn.eu](http://www.eapn.eu)

**The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is an independent network of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union, established in 1990.**



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*This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>.*

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