

20 January 2020

To: Commissioner Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

Dear Commissioner Schmit,

Following our previous correspondence (20 November 2019) we are pleased to write to you today to follow up on the 18th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty meeting (November 2019), which EAPN and DG Employment organised together, with the political support of the Finnish Presidency of the EU. It highlighted five political priorities that people experiencing poverty would like to see on the agenda of the new European Institutions: **Access to Housing; Participation of people experiencing poverty in the lives of their communities and societies; Access to adequate Minimum Income; Access to good quality health care services; Access to decent jobs and equal employment opportunities.**

Participants had prepared their national level priorities with their national EAPN networks in advance, and came together to agree on key demands with people experiencing poverty from all over Europe. You will find the key demands in the attached document.

EAPN is accountable to participants in the PeP meeting, and we aim to report back to them in 2020 on how the European Institutions react to their political priorities, as part of the democratic process.

With this in mind, we'd like to ask the following questions based on the priorities of the meeting:

Housing

- How will the Commission implement Principle 19 of the Social Pillar to ensure people experiencing poverty have access to decent quality social housing?
- What European initiatives are planned to increase the supply of affordable housing in Europe supported by EU Funds, particularly private rented and social housing? What actions can the Commission take to encourage Member States to provide incentives for owners to make their houses available for renting to people experiencing poverty at affordable rents, including by **taxing vacant houses, establishing a rent cap in major cities and having a compulsory percentage of affordable social housing in major housing developments?**
- How will the Commission contribute to addressing speculation on the housing market?

Participation

- How will the Commission create more meaningful spaces for the participation of people experiencing poverty at the European and national level, in political processes which impact their lives, like the Future of Europe and the Semester?
- Will the Commission create guidelines for Directorates-General and Member States to ensure the meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty in such processes?
- How is the Commission allocating resources to support these processes, in order to facilitate the meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty?

Minimum Income

- What steps will the Commission take to ensure the implementation of Principle 14 of the Social Pillar, translating the right to an adequate minimum income into a legally binding commitment for all Member States?
- How will the Commission use the Semester process, specifically the Country Reports and the CSRs to this end, to ensure that Member States remove barriers to accessing adequate minimum income for specific groups (e.g. migrants, homeless people, those without ID papers etc) and reduce punitive conditionality?

Health

- How will the Commission ensure that existing legislation, policies and commitments, including Principle 16 of the Social Pillar and SDG3, will lead to increased affordability of health care (including dental care), reduced waiting times and a stronger focus on mental health issues?
- How will the Commission support and promote national policies addressing persisting health inequalities and an improvement of access to good quality health for particularly vulnerable groups such as homeless people, Roma and undocumented migrants?

Jobs

- How will the Commission ensure that Principle 6 of the Social Pillar will effectively combat low pay and unpaid work?
- How does the Commission plan to tackle the scourge of modern slavery, for example of forced migrant labour or forced prostitution, and 'forced volunteering' (through unpaid 'workfare')?

On behalf of the participants in the meeting, and all our members throughout Europe, we'd appreciate a written response to these questions which can be shared with the meeting participants.

We look forward to discussing these issues, and our wider requests around a post Europe 2020 strategy, an EU anti-poverty strategy, the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the need to ensure the poor don't pay for the European Green Deal and the Just Transition, with your Cabinet member Ana Carla Pereira, when our President is next in Brussels (14 February). We look forward to discussing them with you directly in due course as well.

Yours sincerely,



Carlos Susias

EAPN President



Leo Williams

EAPN Director

Key Political Priorities from the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty for European Institutions

For almost 20 years, the European Anti-Poverty Network and DG Employment have worked together, very often with the Presidencies of the European Council, to organise **an annual European meeting of People Experiencing Poverty**. At least 120 people with direct experience of poverty come together in Brussels, following a period of national level deliberations, to share their insights and experiences with decision makers and influencers at the European level. The meetings provide a space for people experiencing poverty across Europe to use their knowledge and analysis of poverty and exclusion to contribute to key areas of policy development such as: adequacy of income, child poverty, housing and homelessness, indebtedness, the links between discrimination and poverty, the impact of liberalization on public services, decent work, progress made on achieving the EU poverty reduction target, in-work poverty and most recently the link between poverty and education.

The meetings are a concrete example of bridging the gap between the European Union and its citizens. They provide **early warning signs of negative trends** impacting on poverty and social cohesion, and **highlight positive practices emerging in different countries**. The meetings are an empowering experience for people experiencing poverty, and many participants go on to play important roles in anti-poverty organisations and take further actions in their communities. The meetings were conceived as a contribution to the OMC on Social Inclusion and they continue to contribute to key EU debates and policy frameworks such as the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In 2019 participants came up with a number of key political priorities which they would need to see the new European Institutions, and their governments, take meaningful action on. These priorities are outlined below.

Access to Housing

1. Ensure People experiencing poverty have access to decent Social Housing

Access to decent housing is very important for everybody. If you lose your home, you risk losing your social benefits, and this might lead to losing your children. Having decent social housing at affordable rents lets people have stability, dignity, employment, health, education and family unity. To improve access to decent housing, especially for people experiencing poverty, we need:

- Enough quality social housing in all Member States
- Dedicated focus on those who cannot afford to rent a house
- Participation of people in need of housing in decision making processes related to housing situations (e.g. in national, regional or local governments, or in local councils)
- A European Indicator to monitor and compare social housing policies in different EU Member States, with the aim of increasing European understanding and comparability of how social housing works in different countries.

2. Make Decent Private Housing Affordable

- Provide incentives for owners to make their houses available for renting to people experiencing poverty, including by **taxing vacant houses**, **establishing a rent cap in major cities** and **having a compulsory percentage of social housing in major housing developments**.

3. Address speculation on the housing market by regulating it

4. Treat housing as a fundamental right and not as a financial good

Participation of People Experiencing Poverty in the Lives of their Communities and Societies

“Nothing about us, without us, is for us!”

People experiencing poverty can provide efficient and cost-effective solutions in many areas that concern their lives – but **false, top-down organized participation must stop**. Bottom-up participation must be based on **real dialogue** with people experiencing poverty. This needs attention, investment (time, space, money) and **real listening to real needs**.

1. We need governments and EU institutions to trust people experiencing poverty and make them more visible
2. We need the stigmatization of people experiencing poverty to stop
3. We need governments and EU Institutions to make solid investments in participation of people experiencing poverty, in terms of time, space and resources, in order to empower people, build structures and build capacity
4. We need governments and EU Institutions to introduce requirements to meaningfully engage people experiencing poverty in relevant decision-making processes which affect their lives (e.g. development of anti-poverty strategies) and have clear criteria for what counts as meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty

Access to Adequate Minimum Income

Minimum income is a foundation for social justice and social justice is a foundation for social peace and a more equal society. Dignity and respect should underpin all minimum income schemes in Europe. Asking and involving people who need minimum income schemes should be a core part of designing and monitoring minimum income schemes.

1. We need an EU Directive to guarantee the right to adequate minimum income, with adequacy defined in relation to:
 - National Reference budgets – capturing the income needed for a dignified life, through a common calculation of a basket of goods and services
 - The ‘at risk of poverty’ threshold: the level should be above 60% of median disposable household income
2. We need the EU to ensure that Member States remove barriers to accessing minimum income for specific groups – e.g. migrants, homeless people, for example due to lack of ID papers and residence period requirements
3. We need governments to ensure person centered support that avoids punitive conditionality and provides concrete pathways to quality jobs that pay a reasonable wage

Access to Good Quality Health Care Services

1. We need the EU and governments to guarantee good quality healthcare for vulnerable groups (e.g. homeless, Roma, unemployed) in all life situations by:
 - Overcoming urban-rural divides and differences
 - Strongly considering the gender division (e.g. single women, pregnant women)
 - Giving more attention to mental health issues
 - Improving the reimbursement of dental care
2. We need governments to fight and reverse privatization and marketisation of health care by:
 - Keeping universal access and coverage
 - Strengthening access and reducing long waiting time and lists
3. We need governments to overcome the lack of political will to implement and use the existing legislation:
 - Apply legislation or rules on non-discrimination, staffing or reimbursement of costs
 - Governments and public institutions in health must be accountable to people

Access to Decent Jobs and Equal Employment Opportunities

1. We need personalized, integrated support along the lines of comprehensive “active inclusion”¹, with adequate income support helping people transition into decent jobs. This support should be provided through simplified bureaucracy and clear information
2. We need quality, relevant training for workers (paid for by employers during working hours) and jobseekers
3. We need governments and EU Institutions to combat low pay and unpaid work by supporting adequate wages which allow for a life in dignity and ending exploitation, modern slavery and “forced volunteering” through unpaid ‘workfare’

¹ Integrated pathway ensuring access to minimum income/social protection, quality jobs and quality services.