**Report of IFSW European Representatives**

**October 2021 – October 2022**

**The Agency / Network:** European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)

**Names of the Representative:** Birthe Povlsen, member of EAPN’s Policy Group (EUISG). I took over from Fran McDonnell and Ian Johnston who have made a tremendous work during the years. This report is based on their work with the updates from the last year.

EAPN is the largest network of anti-poverty organisations in Europe, representing anti-poverty NGOs and grass roots groups as well as European organisations, working with and for people with direct experience of poverty. At present, EAPN is a network of 32 national networks and 13 European Organisations. It aims to combat poverty and social exclusion by keeping poverty high on the agenda of the EU and ensure cooperation at EU level. EAPN has consultative status with the Council of Europe and is a founding member of the Social Platform.

The Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities, demonstrating the fragility of our health, welfare and social protection systems. After COVID19, there is further risk of undermining social cohesion if the welfare state is not strengthened, and equal rights for all people are not ensured.

In 2021 the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, including a a commitment to reduce poverty by 15 million, was approved by all EU Member States. The Child Guarantee was also approved along with the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities (2021-2030); the Gender Equality Strategy; the Anti-racism Action Plan; the Youth Employment Support package; the European Platform on Combating Homelessness; the Social Economy action plan and the proposal for a Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages.

EAPN welcomed the European Commission’s Action Plan and other intiatives but is advocating a joint commitment by all political levels and actors to an integrated, person-centered strategy to tackle poverty reduction by linking the Green Deal, Digital Europe, and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan[[1]](#footnote-1).

Important initiatives being progressed over the year which EAPN and IFSW Europe will want to lobby on:

• Minimum Income, *Commission launched on the 28. September 2022 Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion[[2]](#footnote-2)*

* The Directive on Minimum Wages; - *The European Parliament and the EU Member States reached today a political agreement on the Directive on adequate minimum wages proposed by the Commission in October 2020*.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* 2022 initiative on long-term care policy reforms; - *The Commission has on the 7.september 2022 launched A European Care Strategy for caregivers and care receivers.[[4]](#footnote-4)*
* A high-level expert group monitoring the adequacy and sustainability of the current social protection systems is being established. – *no news*
* Position Paper on Access to Essential services – *is not yet there*

It has been a challenging year for EAPN due to changes in the position of director and other staff functions. It has had an impact on the work that the secretariat has been able to carry out. Eg. the policy conference was held as an online meeting instead of a physical one. The first physical EUISG meeting will be held in mid-October, where the poverty watch report 2022 will also be launched in collaboration with some MEPs and is held in the EU Parliament in Brussels.

**ACTIVITIES / EVENTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE**

1. All events have been online. I have attended the policy conferences 2022 The Backbone of a Truly Social Europe.

2. 2 online EAPN GA’s , Extraordinary in dezember 21 and ordinary in june 22

3. 5 online EUISG meetings.

4. Meeting in EUISG in Brussels on 11-13.october and participating in the launched of EAPN Poverty Watch report 2022.

5. Participating in the 2nd Mutual Learning Event on Preventive measures to combat homelessness in the EU, taking place in Brussels on 20-21 October 2022.

As part of the work program for 2021/2022, it was decided to prepare a new Poverty watch report in 2022 which could also involve the issue of eco social work.

**IFSW Poverty Watch report 2022**

IFSW THEMATIC FOCUS 2022 was a follow-up on the IMPACT OF COVID-19 on access to social services. The EPSR Principle in Chapter III & Government Action on people facing poverty in time of crisis, and finally climate changes, the impact on poverty and the Role of Social Workers in advancing a New Eco-Social World

The EAPN Poverty Watch survey was sent to members to collect information from social workers to do an impact assessment for EAPN on Covid-19, EU and national policies on people in poverty and vulnerability in Europe, as data for this report 13 country members have replied – Austria, France, Malta, Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Turkey, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, Portugal, Italy, and Ireland.

**The main messages from IFSW Europe in the report:**

*Europe must move away from an incorrect focus on individual responsibility for poverty and rather, move to a focus on the structural issues that give rise to poverty in societies. As the EAPN says, ‘Poverty is the result of poor policy development and implementation, and the absence of the political will to address issues in an in-depth and long-term manner.’*

*Social work, traditionally a white and middle class profession, needs to put poverty back at the centre of our work and engagement with economically marginalized communities.*

*Provide more and better public services across all policy areas, particularly housing, rather than relying on the private sector to resolve the crises, such as, for example, the housing crisis.*

*The Russian invasion of the Ukraine has drastically changed the economic and social landscape across Europe because of the energy crisis and the serious rise in inflation it has generated which affects all in society, but particularly those in, or at risk of poverty. The only positive out of this catastrophic war is the possibility that attempts to reduce fossil fuel consumption will be expedited, which will in the long run support the climate.*

Along with the many recommendations, we made this conclusion in the report:

For too many, income from employment does not support individuals and families to meet the cost of living. This has a knock on effect for many essential services as the employment pay and conditions are too low to attract and retain staff, creating turnover, instability and constricted services (e.g. homecare in some rural areas not available as not profitable). The most of Europe states, it’s institutions and policies fail to provide basic supports and services for its citizens (e.g., withdrawal of public health nurse routine infant checks).

In particular, successive government policies of recent decades have viewed housing as investment rather than as homes and have engaged in very little state led construction of public housing. Europe has record numbers of people experiencing homelessness. The current availability of housing can best be described as a trickle, with scant access to affordable housing for most.

Privatization of many essentials supports and services (e.g. homecare, nursing homes) has led to the development of services that generate profit for stakeholders and investment funds rather than services designed to respond the needs of those who use them.

Social welfare thresholds and criteria create obstacles for many who need them as well as creating excessive administration for those seeking support.

Rapidly rising food and energy prices for households mean many families will make choices about whether to eat or heat their homes in winter 2022.

All the above create unpredictable, precarious and anxiety-ridden lives for the steadily increasing number of people living in Europe who cannot access housing, employment that covers the cost of living, general practitioner services, health services, childcare or education that meets the needs of their children. If an individual or family member has a disability, a health issue or any kind of other additional needs, they have many more struggles and barriers to access essential supports and services, to vindicate their rights and to participate fully in society.

Social workers reported that they spent a disproportionate amount of time and energy advocating for vital basics (housing, health services, income support) and essential supports and services on behalf of service users. Promising practice examples provided by respondents were heartening to read, particularly those led by state funded organizations. However, one emerging theme was that the neoliberal emphasis on individual rights and responsibilities shifts the focus on the individual instead of focusing on the organizations and structures that create and reinforce the poverty, unnecessary suffering and inequalities.

How do we handle corona, climate and welfare at the same time? And how do we make it socially just, so that those who have the least and the employees suffering poor working conditions are all fully protected and not burdened with the Bill for the pandemic and financial crisis.

The corona crisis has been a remarkable boost to the welfare narrative. During the corona crisis, it dawned on many that the private and public sectors are 100 percent dependent on each other. That we need all subject groups. That the Nordic labor market model can do something unique. And that the special Nordic universal welfare model with free and equal access to welfare showed that it had something to offer to other social models of welfare.

It is on this basis that we build our optimism. We must get going in the 2020s with an active fiscal policy. Politically, it is about advocating across Europe for models of welfare similar to the Nordic welfare model. It is about giving people security and good lives and opportunities for social mobility. But there are also strong socio-economic arguments for investing in people. Investing in children, daycare centers, schools, health, education, social policy, etc. is an investment in the lives of children and adults here and now. We must strengthen the public sector and have the calculation models redone so that they also count on the benefits of public investment in people. We must invest in people and welfare now. As a society, we cannot afford not to

The report is publish on IFSW Europe:

**Question to the report and issues to be discuss in DM meeting**

The Hungarian organization suggested in their response that IFSW could send a delegation to the country to discuss with the authorities, possibly by carrying out a study on how to improve the social dialogue with the various NGOs.

At the same time, it was proposed to set up a central EU fund to ensure the opportunities for the NGOs to be able to advocate for the poor part of the population.

IFSW should work to ensure that EU funds are used for locally rooted social work in collaboration with people experiences poverty.

**How much should IFSW get involved in concrete requests from member states and is it a good idea to work for a central EU fund and the purpose of this.**

**How shall we work with minimum income recommendation from The Council.**

1. EAPN Reaction to the State of the Union (SOTEU) 2021

   https://www.eapn.eu/eapn-reaction-to-soteu-15-sep-2021/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <file:///C:/Users/klaus/Downloads/COM_2022_490_1_EN_ACT_part1_v5.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1539&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10290> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=792&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10382> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)