



European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland

Annual Report 2023

Introduction

The context in which EAPN Ireland and its members work has been quickly evolving over the past number of years. This has been particularly since the outbreak of the covid pandemic, followed by the outbreak and intensification of wars and conflicts, including in Europe and its borders. Rapidly rising prices, on top of the already high cost of housing and other services, has resulted in increasing numbers of people facing major challenges in being able to afford the cost of living. Alongside this the destructive consequences of climate change on both the environment and humanity are becoming increasingly obvious.

These growing challenges and their impact on people, communities and society in Ireland, Europe and globally create a growing urgency to find sustainable and effective solutions, solutions that work for everyone in society and achieve the aim of the Sustainable Development Goals, to leave no-one behind.

However, we can see from the ongoing experience on the ground, backed up by endless amounts of data, that the same groups and communities continue to experience the highest levels of poverty and social exclusion and continue to be impacted the most by the different crises. This is true in Ireland, despite being one of the wealthiest countries in the world and its positive economic outlook. There is growing frustration with being unable to break the cycle of inequality and successfully tackle issues such as inadequate incomes, lack of quality housing, health inequality, inadequate care infrastructure, barriers to employment and discrimination that lie at the root of this for many. There is also a frustration that even where promising policy has been developed, usually after the active engagement of communities and community organisations, this policy is not fully or effectively implemented.

Despite, and because of these challenges, EAPN Ireland strongly believes that change will only come about through working in solidarity across the most marginalised groups and communities in society which experience the worst consequences of inequality. We reject any attempts to create division and distract from where the real focus of change needs to be. This belief is also at the core of our European network, which EAPN Ireland continues to be active in.

This approach is reflected in the work EAPN Ireland has undertaken in 2023 and is reflected in our annual report which outlines the policy and campaigns work we have been involved in, much of it linked to working with organisations and communities across our diverse membership and beyond. The importance of working in solidarity was addressed in our AGM workshop in June entitled '*Building solidarity for ending poverty in a challenging environment*', which has sparked ongoing reflections on how community organisations can play an effective role in bringing about change that tackles the challenges outlined above.

We will continue to work for change at national and European level in 2024, a year which will see local and European elections, and potentially a general election, which in themselves will bring challenges and opportunities.

1. Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns

Implementing an effective anti-poverty strategy

Roadmap for Social Inclusion

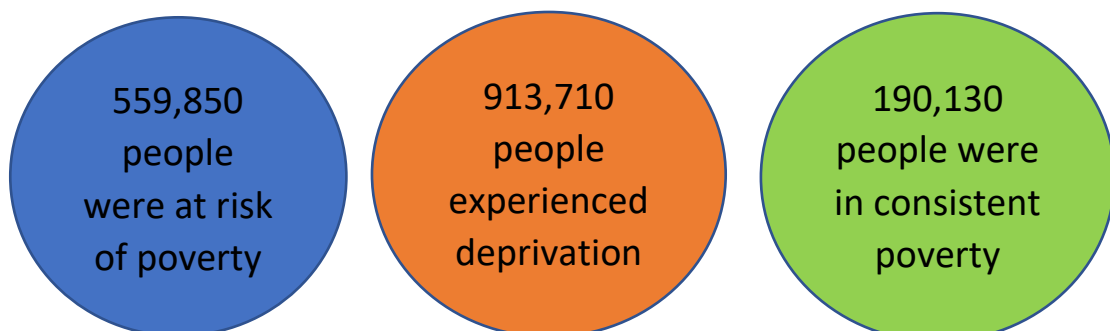
Implementing an integrated anti-poverty strategy is the most effective way of addressing the multidimensional causes of poverty and social exclusion. The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 is Ireland's current integrated strategy and in 2023 EAPN Ireland continued to be very active in seeking to inform its content and implementation.

The EAPN Ireland Director, Paul Ginnell, represents EAPN Ireland as one of three external members on the Steering Group overseeing the implementation of the Roadmap. Along with the other representatives, Paul facilitates the engagement of representatives from the wider Community and Voluntary sector through a linkage group. Overall, the challenge continues to be a delivery that will have a real impact and make sustainable improvements in the lives of people and communities.

EAPN Ireland contributed to the mid-term review of the Roadmap which was concluded in time for the Social Inclusion Forum in June 2023. The outcome of the review was a maintaining of the ambition in the existing targets and some minor additions and updates to the policy commitments in the Roadmap.

One of the main targets of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion is to reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less by 2025. The latest information for 2023, published in early 2024 showed that 3.6% of the population, or over 190,000 people, were in consistent poverty in 2023. This was achieved primarily through once off cost-of-living supports. This is a welcome reduction in consistent poverty from 4.9% in 2022. However, the same report from the Central Statistics Office showed that the number of people experiencing deprivation increased over the same period indicating that incomes are failing to keep pace with the cost of living. EAPN Ireland published a press statement on the latest income and poverty data followed by the circulation of a detailed [Briefing](#).

In 2023



Social Inclusion Forum 2023

The 2023 Social Inclusion Forum took place on the 1st June in the Radison Hotel in Dublin. The four themes for the 2023 Forum were Core Essentials, Children, Older People, and Expanding Opportunities for Employment.

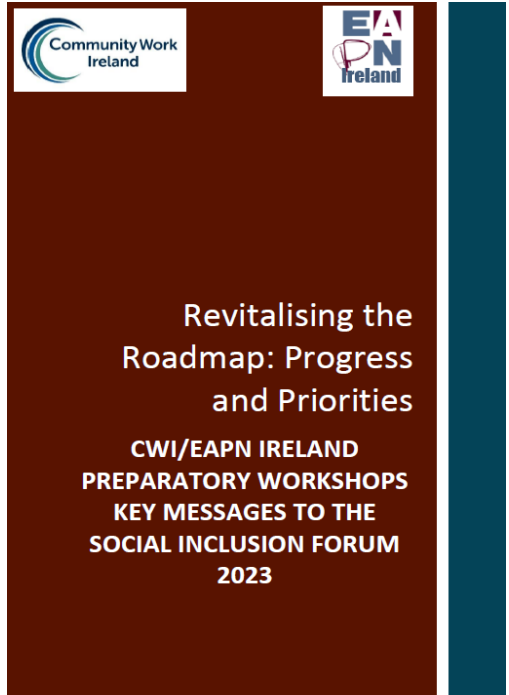
As in previous years, EAPN Ireland and Community Work Ireland (CWI) carried out a preparatory process with 84 people attending in person workshops in Roscommon and Sligo and two online



Paul Ginnell speaking at the Social Inclusion Forum

workshops in advance of the Forum.

In order to inform the discussion an oral report from the preparatory workshops was presented at the Forum, with the involvement of a number of the workshop participants. A [Key Messages](#) document was prepared and circulated by EAPN Ireland and CWI.



Participants at the Social Inclusion Forum with Minister of State Joe O'Brien and Senator Eileen Flynn (centre)

Access to an adequate income for a decent life

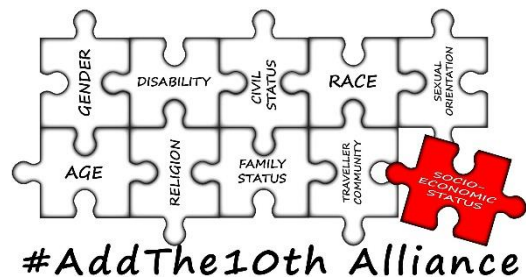
Access to an income that is adequate to enable someone in or out of work to live life with dignity is a critical element of an integrated range of measures needed to address the structural causes of poverty in all its dimensions. During 2023 this continued to be a priority for EAPN Ireland, made more challenging because of the ongoing cost of living crisis that has had a very negative impact on people's lives.

A key campaign for the Network has been the campaign for the benchmarking of social welfare at a level that is adequate to lift people above the poverty line and provide them with a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. This was the main focus of the organisation's submission to the Department of Social Protection's consultation on benchmarking of social welfare in 2023. It was also a key focus in the organisation's engagement with the annual Budget process and the implementation of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In January 2023, the EU adopted a *Recommendation on adequate income ensuring active inclusion*. This includes a focus on the adequacy, access, and take-up of income supports with a connection to the creation of inclusive labour markets and improving access to enabling and essential services. In November the Network organised a webinar on the Recommendation with a presentation from our European Network. The goal was to create awareness of the Recommendation as a potential tool for raising standards around social welfare and how it is provided in Ireland. While the Recommendation is welcome progress, and EAPN will push for it to be fully implemented, its implementation is voluntary in nature. Therefore, EAPN will continue to campaign for an enforceable and rights-based EU Directive on Minimum Income.

Socio-economic status as a ground for discrimination in Irish law

EAPN Ireland, along with other members of the #AddThe10th Alliance, continued to campaign for socio-economic status to be added as a ground for discrimination in Irish equality legislation. As part of this campaign the Alliance contributed to the review of Irish equality legislation initiated by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in 2021. A summary of submissions was published by the Department in 2023, but no further progress took place. From mid-2022 to mid-2023 Paul Ginnell participated as a member of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's Future of Equality Legislation Advisory Committee, which also made a detailed submission to the review progress. In a welcome development the Spring 2024 legislative programme published by the Government includes a commitment to introducing the Equality Acts Amendment Bill. This has led to optimism that there might be some progress on this campaign.

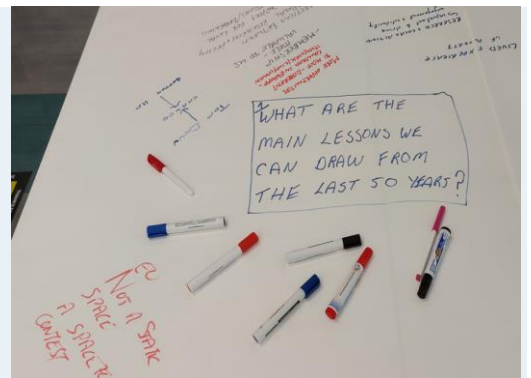


Conference on Ireland's Contribution to the EU's role in tackling poverty



In May 2023, EAPN Ireland hosted a hybrid Conference on 'Ireland's Contribution to the EU's role in tackling poverty' to mark 50 years of Ireland in the EU. The interactive Conference, introduced by John Brennan, the Chair, and Paul Ginnell, the Director, of EAPN Ireland involved two very engaging panels held either side of a world café table discussion. The first panel, hosted by Professor Mary Murphy from Maynooth University looked at Ireland's contribution over the past 50 years

of EU membership. The panel was comprised of Margaret Barry, formerly with the Combat Poverty Agency, Helen Johnston, National Economic and Social Council, Martin Collins, Pavee Point Roma and Traveller Centre, and Robin Hanan, former EAPN Ireland Director.



The final panel, hosted by Dr Joe Whelan from Trinity College Dublin, drew on this experience and table discussion to draw lessons for the future. The second panel included Lesley O'Reilly, St Kevin's Family Resource Centre, Niall





Crowley, Values Lab, Patrick O’Riordan, European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland, and Roshin Sen, Department of Social Protection.

A publication with the same title as the conference was also disseminated to coincide with the conference and included a new article by Hugh Frazer which captured the experience of the fight against poverty and social exclusion and for a more Social Europe over the past 50 years.

Giving voice to the reality of poverty at European level

In November the 21st European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty took place in Madrid. The theme of Meeting was *The Unbearable Cost of Living*. National delegates discussed how the unaffordable and rapidly increasing cost of living is impacting on people in their countries and made proposals to EU and national policy makers on the policy responses that were needed.

The Irish delegation highlighted the impact of the cost of essentials including energy and housing, and the inadequate incomes of many to meet these costs. The delegates for the 2023 Meeting were Annie Curbelo Lang, representing Age Action and Aurelie Naiker representing Nasc Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre in Cork. The delegates highlighted the issues for older people and migrants and how these issues intersect with the experience of others in society. The Irish delegation was led by Lesley O’Reilly from St Kevin’s FRC, who is a Board member of EAPN Ireland.



Annie Curbelo Lang being interviewed by Spanish TV



Lesley O’Reilly (centre) taking part in a panel discussion



Lesley O’Reilly, Annie Curbelo Lang and Aurelie Naiker

Other policy work

Policy Submissions: During 2023 EAPN Ireland made submissions on Budget 2024, Pay-Related Benefit for Jobseekers, benchmarking of social welfare payments and the National Reform Programme. There was also active engagement with the Department of Social Protection's Green Paper on Disability Reform, which was subsequently withdrawn in early 2024.

Poverty Watch 2023: In December EAPN Ireland launched its 2023 Poverty Watch. The Poverty Watch presented the up-to-date information on poverty in Ireland, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, and the Government's response within a context of fiscal justice and social rights. The 2023 Poverty Watch also focused on how older people and people in Direct Provision are impacted by both poverty and relevant Government decisions.



AGM Conference

The EAPN Ireland AGM took place in June 2023 and included a conference 'Building solidarity for ending poverty in a challenging environment'. The workshop sought to address the question: How can those of us working to end poverty more effectively build solidarity among people and communities experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and generate the public and political support needed to bring about effective change? It involved inputs from Paula Kearney from Inner City Organisations Network (ICON) and Niall Crowley from the Values Lab, followed by an engaging discussion with members and other attendees.

Summary of Publications, Submissions and Press Statements in 2023

- [Press Statement on Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2022, January](#)
- [Press Statement – “Perfect Storm” Threatening International Protection Seekers and Local Communities, February](#)
- [Submission to National Reform Programme, February](#)
- [Submission to Consultation on Pay-Related Benefit for Jobseekers, March](#)
- [Briefing on Poverty and Income Data 2022, April](#)
- [Key Messages to Social Inclusion Forum from the Preparatory meetings, June](#)
- Published [Ireland's contribution to the EU's role in tackling poverty, June](#)
- [Pre-Budget Submission 2024](#) and [Press Statement](#) after Budget announcement, *June and October*
- [Submission to Department of Social Protection on benchmarking, June](#)
- [Better Europe Alliance Submission to Semester Process, November](#)
- Published [Poverty Watch 2023](#) and Press Statement, *December*


Communications

Communicating with its members, the wider public and policy makers is an important tool for EAPN Ireland in bringing about social change. The main communications work was carried out by Tim Hanley, the new Policy and Communications Officer who joined EAPN Ireland in January 2023.

The EAPN Ireland **website** www.eapn.ie is kept updated with all the latest news on the Network and its activities.

EAPN Ireland produced four **press statements** on some of the key developments over the year and took part in a number of radio interviews.

X EAPN Ireland is very active on **X** **@EAPNIreland**

 The network also has a presence on Instagram **eapnireland30**

We published a **Blog** in advance of Budget 2024: **Government must use the Budget process to tackle inequality.**

Five editions of the EAPN Ireland **NewsFlash e-newsletter** were published in 2023. These go to almost 1,000 recipients to update them on the activities of EAPN Ireland, our European network and other national and European news.

Taking to the streets

During 2023 EAPN Ireland participated in a number of public shows of solidarity. This included the #IrelandForAll Solidarity March in February and the World Refugee Day Rally at the Garden of Remembrance in June.



2. Working Effectively Through Networks

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



Since its foundation in 1990 EAPN Ireland has been an active member of the **EAPN (Europe)** and this continued in 2022. EAPN (Europe) currently has a membership of 32 national networks and 13 European organisations. The European network plays a crucial role at EU level in

mobilising those experiencing poverty, their organisations and policy makers in the fight against poverty.

In 2023 Anne Loftus continued to represent EAPN Ireland on the Executive Committee (Board) of EAPN (Europe) and Paul Ginnell represented them on the European network's policy group (EU Inclusion Strategies Group). Lesley O'Reilly took over as the Irish Coordinator for the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty and Tim Hanley and Lesley O'Reilly represented EAPN Ireland on the Communications Group of EAPN (Europe). The majority of EAPN Meetings and events continued to be online however Irish delegates attended the EAPN Poverty Summit in Brussels, held alongside meetings of the Board and Policy Group, and the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty which took place in Madrid in November.

The impact of the ongoing cost of living crisis and increasing poverty levels continued to be a focus for EAPN in 2023, alongside policy priorities linked to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and ensuring that the European Semester process delivers a more social and sustainable future. More at www.eapn.eu.



Paul Ginnell (left) and Lesley O'Reilly (second left) on the closing panel of the EAPN (Europe) Poverty Summit in Porto, Portugal in March



EAPN Ireland delegates Anne Loftus (Left), Gillian Stafford (Second Left) and Lesley O'Reilly (third from right) enjoying a more social moment with EAPN colleagues after the EAPN Summit in Porto



COMMUNITY PLATFORM
CHALLENGING POVERTY & INEQUALITY

Since 2012 EAPN Ireland has supported the coordination of the Community Platform. During 2023 the Platform continued to engage policy makers in discussion on its proposals for a new and more effective model of collaborative governance between government and civil society. This approach would result in more effective and sustainable solutions to addressing societal challenges such as poverty, housing, care, health inequality and climate transition.

With support from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission the Platform developed its submission to the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, which carried out their fourth review of Ireland in early 2024.

The Platform also developed its Manifesto for the Local, European and General Elections in advance of the elections.

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



01. Introduction

The Programme for Government (PG) 2020-2024 sets out the Government's commitments to social dialogue recognising "the importance of regular and open engagement with all sectors of society". It commits to the establishment of a Social Dialogue Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach and to "create new models of sectoral engagement". The Community Platform welcomes the emphasis on new 'models' as opposed to a single approach to sectoral engagement between the state and civil

To move forward, it is necessary to address the challenges with current models of engagement between the state and civil society. Community Platform members have identified a number of core concerns including a lack of joined up, multidimensional and complementary approaches to solving issues; limited collaborative leadership capacity; the engagement of civil society in mechanisms that demand time and energy, but which struggle to generate effective outcomes; and a need and willingness from all participants in collaborative processes to learn from each other.



Better Europe Alliance

In 2014 EAPN Ireland brought together, and continues to support, the Better Europe Alliance of Irish Civil Society Organisations working for a Social and Sustainable Europe. The 12 members of the Alliance involves social and equality organisations, the Environmental Pillar and SIPTU.

During 2023 the Alliance members continued to engage with the European Semester process making a joint submission to the Semester process, which was disseminated to EU and national policy makers in November.



EAPN Ireland is a member of Coalition 2030, the Irish coalition of civil society organisations which has come together to ensure that the Irish Government is effectively implementing policies to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Coalition includes domestic anti-poverty and equality organisations, Trade Unions, international development NGOs and

environmental organisations. A key priority for the Coalition in 2023 was the UN review of Ireland's implementation of their SDG commitments in July in New York. The Coalition prepared its own shadow report for the review and contributed to the Government's implementation report. The Coalition website is <https://coalition2030.ie/>.

3. The Organisation

Membership

EAPN Ireland has almost 160 members. These members are mainly local and national organisations and a number of individuals committed to bringing about a more just society and addressing the causes and consequences of poverty.

Board

The Board of EAPN Ireland plays an important role in providing leadership to the organisation and met eight times during 2023.

Board Members during this period were:

- Aiden Lloyd (The Rights Platform – Vice-Chair)
- Anne Loftus (Theatre for Change Galway)
- Farai Calvin Jeyacheya (Zimbabwe Heritage Trust)
- John Brennan (Irish Association of Social Workers - Chairperson)
- Kerrie Prendergast (Longford Women’s Link)
- Lesley O’Reilly - St. Kevin’s Family Resource Centre, Kilnamanagh, Dublin
- Loraine Mulligan (SIPTU)
- Sive Bresnihan (Comhlámh - Treasurer)

Joined in 2023

- Amy Ward, (Irish Traveller Movement)
- Dave Byrne, (Age Action)
- Kiren (Khalid) Mustafa (NASC Migrant and Refugee Rights, Cork)
- Peter Kearns, (Independent Living Movement Ireland)

Staff

EAPN Ireland has three part-time staff:

- Paul Ginnell, Director
- Tim Hanley, Policy and Communications Officer
- Maureen Gondipon, Administration and Finance Officer

Following the departure of Irene Byrne in late 2022, we welcomed Tim Hanley as the new Policy and Communications Officer in January 2023.

Funding

EAPN Ireland receives its core funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNOs). The current funding runs from July 2022 to June 2025. Accessing this scheme is critical to EAPN Ireland being able to operate and to draw in additional funding to run the organisation and organise activities.

During 2023 the network also accessed the following funding:

- EAPN (Europe) provides support for our policy work on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Semester and to produce the Poverty Watch and also to support participation in the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty;
- The Department of Social Protection provided support for our work with Community Work Ireland to support participation in the Social Inclusion Forum;
- Funding was received from the Department of Foreign Affairs Communicating Europe Initiative for a conference and publication to mark 50 years of Ireland in the EU.
- The Department of the Rural and Community Development provided funding for the Community Platform.

Last but not least, income from the members of EAPN Ireland, included generous donations in 2023, continues to be an extremely important and valued resource in supporting the ongoing work of the organisation.

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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

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

