

Impact study on the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty

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Dear reader,

I'm very proud to be able to present you this study on the impact of the European Meetings of People experiencing Poverty on European policy making.

It was at the initiative of the Belgian Presidency in 2001 that the first Meeting of People experiencing Poverty took place building on the tradition in Belgium of dialogue with associations and people experiencing poverty. We started from the observation that it is impossible to develop a truly social policy if a large group of people are excluded. Excluded from the economy, excluded from cultural life, excluded from the decision-making process, and so much more... Since the first European meeting of 2001, things have changed in a positive way. The meetings became part of the institutional program of the European Union. It is no longer a voluntary initiative of a country, but an annual obligation to organise it.

Another development that makes me very happy is that more and more people in poverty take the floor at this meeting. Before, it was mostly professionals in the fight against poverty who were heard.

A third positive development is that, at the request of people in poverty, the Meetings have provided more room for dialogue with policymakers. This is not irrelevant! The study shows that 80% of political leaders who attended learned a lot and have changed their attitudes regarding poverty and poor people. But dialogue is also important for people in poverty. Especially if they have been living in poverty for a long time, they feel excluded and not listened to, and end up believing they are worthless. It makes me optimistic to read that 87% of people in poverty who participated in these meetings were able to make steps forward in their personal development.

Dialogue enhances mutual understanding. Politicians learn to look beyond stereotypes. People in poverty learn to see that developing a policy to fight against poverty also requires patience, compromise, debate, confrontation of ideas, action and support in the public opinion.

In 2000, Europe had promised to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010. But Europe has not delivered. Meanwhile, we are in an economic crisis. Economic crises put pressure on public finances. As a result, in many European countries, we see cuts in social protection and social security and less willingness to redistribute the wealth more equitably. We have difficult times ahead. It is our conviction that, especially in times of crisis, more investment in social issues is necessary to avoid a deepening of the crisis. It is not the people who are living in poverty, who are the cause of the actual crisis, so let's listen to them and let's not victimize them again!

Europe has decided to create a European Platform Against Poverty. For us this Platform must be equipped with instruments of coordination, decision making and of course must ensure the participation of those concerned. This study proves the efficiency and utility of participation and thus of the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty.

We hope the study can inspire you in your work and other commitments.

*Philippe Courard,
Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty, Belgium*

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INTRODUCTION

During 2010, which is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the ninth European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty took place. All the nine meetings have brought together people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion together to share their experiences, to dialogue with decision-makers and to reflect on the state of EU policy-making. Do these meetings actually make a difference? This question constitutes the focus of this report.

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) entrusted the study on the impact of the meetings to the Centre OASeS (Inequality, Poverty, Social Exclusion and the City) of the University of Antwerp. The study is funded by the federal government of Belgium (Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration). As President of the Council of the European Union in 2001, Belgium organized the first European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty. Nine editions later, the Belgian government has again got the honour of holding the EU Presidency and wanted to take the opportunity to measure the impact that these meetings have had.

The research has been guided by a Steering Committee, consisting of representatives of the European Commission, the federal Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty, the Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration, EAPN, and the research team.

The impact of the meetings has been studied in three ways, namely by focusing on their impact on people experiencing poverty (PEP), on civil society actors and their impact on policies and policymakers.

The goals were translated into the following three research questions:

1. Did the meetings have an impact on people experiencing poverty?

Did the meetings contribute to the personal development of the participating people experiencing poverty? Did the meetings stimulate a sense of solidarity between people experiencing poverty? Did the meetings enhance awareness that poverty is a societal problem and not (only) an individual problem? How did participation in the meetings help people experiencing poverty to become more engaged in policy discussions? Has the participation in these meetings improved the material conditions of the people experiencing poverty?

2. Did the meetings have an impact on civil society organizations and institutions?

Were the meetings useful for institutional/civil society actors? Did the meetings stimulate public debate about the fight against poverty? Did the meetings stimulate institutional/civil society actors to fight poverty? Were partnerships/networks created at the meetings? With whom (organizations, politicians, journalists, etc.)? Were any good practices exchanged?

Have the EU meetings encouraged institutions or organizations to strengthen the direct participation of people experiencing poverty?

3. Did the meetings have an impact on European or national policies and policymakers?

Did the meetings stimulate policymakers to fight poverty? Did the meetings enhance the policy participation of people experiencing poverty? Are discussions and recommendations of the meetings translated into policies? Were there any positive or negative policy outcomes of the meetings? Which poverty-reduction policies are necessary at the European and the national level? Did the meetings have an impact on poverty-reduction policies at national and European level? Did the meetings change policymakers' views of poverty? How can the impact on poverty-reduction policies be enhanced (e.g. through dialogue, strategic timing, cooperation, media attention, etc.)?

In the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty, the participation process is very important. Efforts are made to support every participant in taking the floor and to establish a dialogue with others. The current study therefore also looks at the evaluation of participation during the meetings. This is formulated in a fourth research question:

4. How can participation at the meetings be enhanced?

Which elements strengthen or weaken participation at the meetings? What did the participants think of the preparation process, the language spoken, the information given about the meetings, the work pressure, the opportunities to intervene in the debate and the gap between their expectations and the results of the meetings?

In order to study our four research questions and the impact of the meetings, we used several methods. We conducted a web survey, studied five case study countries (Belgium, Italy, Poland, Lithuania and Norway) and conducted several in-depth interviews with experts. By doing so, we wanted to give a voice to the people experiencing poverty themselves, as well as to policymakers, administrators, European and national NGOs, national coordinators, members of the Social Protection Committee, commission officials, politicians, the organizing team, EAPN, etc. We wanted to capture the views of civil society organizations, politicians, and in particular the opinions of people experiencing poverty themselves who have participated in these meetings.

We explicitly thank all the respondents and case study countries for their cooperation in this research.

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LIST OF FREQUENTLY USED TERMS

EAPN: *“Since 1990, the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) has been an independent network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union. At present, EAPN is a network of: 27 National Networks of voluntary organisations and grassroots groups and 23 European organizations.”*

(For further information, see: <http://www.eapn.eu>)

European Commission: *“The European Commission is the EU's executive body. It represents and upholds the interests of Europe as a whole. It drafts proposals for new European laws. It manages the day-to-day business of implementing EU policies and spending EU funds. The Commission also makes sure that everyone abides by the European treaties and laws.”*

(For further information, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/>)

European Council: *“The European Council defines the general political direction and priorities of the European Union. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009, it became an institution. Its President is Herman Van Rompuy. The European Council provides the Union with the necessary impetus for its development and defines the general political directions and priorities thereof. It does not exercise legislative functions.”*

(For further information,

see: <http://www.european-council.europa.eu/the-institution.aspx?lang=en>)

Hard law (the opposite of soft law): When the European Union can force coercive measures with possible sanctions, this is called 'hard law'. The matters on which the EU has no binding decisions can be considered as 'soft law'.

NAP (National Action Plan): The NAPs describe to what extent the guidelines of previous years can be achieved and what the future plans are. After this, those plans are discussed and evaluated, both at national and European level.

OMC (Open Method of Coordination): Through the OMC, Member States can learn from each other about the best practices and policies on social protection and inclusion, without any legal obligations attached.

Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion: *“Every autumn in connection with the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the incumbent Presidency holds a European round table conference on poverty and social exclusion together with the European Commission.”*

(For further information, see: http://www.se2009.eu/en/meetings_news/2009/10/15/8th_european_round_table_on_poverty_and_social_exclusion)

The Europe 2020 strategy: *“The Europe 2020 strategy put forward by the Commission sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century. It shows how the EU can*

come out stronger from the crisis and how it can be turned into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. To deliver rapid and lasting results, stronger economic governance will be required."

Europe 2020 puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities: Smart growth (developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation), sustainable growth (promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy and inclusive growth (fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion).

The EU needs to define where it wants to be by 2020. To this end, the Commission proposes the following EU headline targets: 75 % of the population aged 20-64 should be employed, 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D, the "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right, the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree and at least 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.

(For further information, see: http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm and http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm)

SPC (Social Protection Committee): *"The Social Protection Committee is a Treaty-based Committee (Article 160 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) which was formally created through Council Decisions in 2000 and 2004. The SPC serves as a vehicle for cooperative exchange between Member States and the European Commission in the framework of the Open Method of Co-ordination on social inclusion, health care and long-term care as well as pensions ("Social" OMC). In particular, the Committee plays a central role in preparing the discussion in the Council on the annual Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The Committee also prepares reports, formulates opinions or undertakes other work within its fields of competence, at the request of either the Council or the Commission or on its own initiative."*

(For further information, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social>)

HISTORY OF THE EUROPEAN MEETINGS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

In 2000, the EU's Lisbon Strategy was adopted, including a focus on making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty in the European Community by 2010. This strategy led to the organization of the first European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty. In the first half of 2001, under Belgium's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Minister for Social Integration, Mr Vande Lanotte, opened the first European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, which had the title "We also participate in Europe". The Belgian government had already leveraged its experience since 1994. One year later, the Lisbon Strategy was consolidated at Nice. One of the objectives was to mobilize all relevant bodies, including people experiencing poverty (EAPN, 2005; EAPN, 2008).

The first meetings highlighted the following subjects: housing, health, training and incomes. The conclusion of this first event was that people experiencing poverty had the knowledge and expertise to analyse exclusion, and wanted to take part in society and the policy decisions that affected their lives (EAPN, 2008).

Since then, the meetings have taken place every year in Brussels, as a two-day series of discussions between delegations of people experiencing poverty and national coordinators, representatives of national governments, the European Commission, European non-governmental organizations and social partners. The meetings have evolved from introducing a preparatory process, testing and improving the working methodology, identifying topics of most relevance to people experiencing poverty, challenging language and introducing non-verbal communication elements and most importantly creating similar national processes advancing participation of people experiencing poverty (EAPN, 2009).

After the first meeting, the delegations and participants asked to continue the participation process and the meetings. In 2002, the Belgian government suggested holding a second meeting to the Greek Presidency. In 2003, the Greek Presidency followed this suggestion, and took the initiative to continue the meetings. At this second meeting EAPN also became involved. The topic of the second meeting was "good participation practices". There were preparations, workshops and the demand of the delegations to have face-to-face dialogue with policymakers (EAPN, 2008).

The Greek Presidency suggested making the meetings a recurrent process, like the Social Inclusion Round Table. The Irish Presidency agreed in 2004, and organized a third meeting. The topic was the dialogue between people experiencing poverty and policymakers under the title, "Participation is a two-way street". Policymakers were invited as guests of people experiencing poverty. During the workshops they could engage in dialogue with them. The process of participation was consolidated, the meetings became part of the European agenda and the EAPN National Networks started to raise awareness among national and regional policymakers. The National Networks became responsible for the preparation and follow-up activities (EAPN, 2008).

In 2005, the Luxembourg Presidency organized the fourth European meeting. The focus was on non-verbal communication, images and perceptions about poverty. The results were communicated at the Glasgow Round Table. The Luxembourg Presidency went to the June

Council of Ministers with a message urging all the EU Member States to organize similar meetings. The EAPN National Networks gradually started to set up similar kind of national meetings at the local level (EAPN, 2008).

The fifth meeting was organized under the Austrian Presidency in 2006 and chose as its topic: “How do we cope with everyday life?” During this meeting, each national delegation prepared a poster and presented it at the plenary session. The posters were exhibited at the Finnish Round Table, in the Commission building and at the first National Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty in the United Kingdom in 2007 (EAPN, 2008).

The sixth meeting was organized under the German Presidency. Entitled “Strengthening Progress, drafting next steps”, it emphasized the empowerment of participation. There were delegations from 27 countries and almost 100 representatives of European and national authorities (EAPN, 2008).

In 2008, the Slovenian Presidency organized the seventh European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, with its main topics being social services, services of general interest, housing and minimum income. The title of the meeting was: “Four pillars in the fight against poverty” (EAPN, 2008).

The eighth meeting focused on housing, basic services and financial inclusion and was organized by the Czech Presidency, under the title: “Where we live – what we need” (EAPN, 2008).

During 2010, the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the ninth meeting was organized by the Spanish Presidency. The meeting took place, for the first time, inside the European Parliament building in Brussels. During the meeting, the following topics were discussed: financial inclusion, housing exclusion, services and participation (EAPN, 2010).

In these 10 years, the meetings have become indispensable. They have been embedded in the European agenda, supported by the presidencies and the European Commission, linked to relevant Council meetings and Round Tables and improving the way participation was organized every year.

More and more attention was paid to the participatory process for the preparation and follow-up of the meetings. National coordinators played a crucial role in supporting and coordinating the national delegations of people experiencing poverty in their preparations for the European meetings. They also strengthened the follow-up of the meetings at the national level and guaranteed the extra input of participants who could not attend the European meetings. After the meetings, people were supported in dealing with new information, accompanied in the evaluation of the meeting and informed about the impact of their participation (EAPN, 2009).

The meetings showed that there is no best way to participate. Many of the meetings focused on the question of how to develop an inclusive and participative methodology to inspire poverty-reduction policies and to improve the lives of people experiencing poverty. Every year, new elements are introduced, including, for example, workshops, plenary sessions and dialogue with politicians and other officials (EAPN, 2009).

1. Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, we used several different methods of data collection and analysis. In this chapter, we present and explain these different research methods. We made use of four main methods. Firstly, a literature review was undertaken in order to give an overview of existing research results. This was followed by a web survey, interviews with experts and interviews in five case-study countries. We used both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

1.1. Literature review

We performed a literature review in order to build a conceptual framework and explore existing research results. We analysed documents that contributed to the understanding of questions of participation, poverty and European policies. The documents we used were the minutes and evaluations of the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty, European policy documents, memoranda and policy documents of EAPN and other NGOs, and studies on participation.

1.2. Web survey

A questionnaire was developed and sent to the various participants in the meetings. These include people experiencing poverty, the representatives of associations of people experiencing poverty, civil society actors, the organizing team, academics and policymakers. In order to understand the population that needed to be invited, we made use of the list of participants of all the former meetings.

A range of closed and open questions was constructed to get an overview of the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the European Meetings and their follow-up processes. The focus was fourfold: the impact on people experiencing poverty, the impact on civil society actors, the impact on policies and an evaluation of participation.

The questionnaire was put on the internet and the respondents got an e-mail, with an explanation of the purpose of the research and a link to the questionnaire. The invitation to participate in the research was sent by the research team, and was followed by an encouraging e-mail from EAPN and a reminder e-mail from the researchers and EAPN.

The web survey was sent to 729 e-mail addresses, of which 300 were still valid. Because we used the participant lists dating back to the first of the European Meetings, most of the e-mail addresses were invalid since many of the participants had moved jobs, political functions, organizations and addresses, or simply did not use their e-mail addresses any more. Of the 300 respondents with valid e-mail addresses, 79 answered our questionnaire.

20% of the respondents were policymakers (European Commission officials, national government representatives or SPC members). The largest response was from NGOs (35%) and people experiencing poverty and the coordinators of the European Meetings (35%). 10% of the respondents were part of the organizing team. Finally 3% of the respondents were academics.

Of the respondents to the web survey, 48% were only present at the meetings once. 16% were present twice and 16% were present three times. 20% of the respondents had participated more than three times.

Of course, these figures only represent part of the answers. In general, closed questions only present a limited picture of the situation. That is why we also used open questions in our web survey. Figures and numbers give us information about the degree of participation, the impact and the differences between respondents. They give us less information about the quality of the participation and on 'why' existing views may differ. Therefore, qualitative research methods were used to evaluate participation in the meetings and the impact on policies over time. They give attention to several interpretations and visions of the respondents, take into account the multi-dimensional approach to poverty, policies and participation, add depth to the closed questions of the questionnaire, are flexible and grant importance to what the respondents themselves are saying. Researching the impact of the meetings only by employing statistics would be too narrow an approach (Bryman, 2004; Warren, 2002). For the in-depth interviews with key individuals and for the in-depth case-study interviews, we also used open questions.

1.3. In-depth interviews with key individuals

Twelve in-depth interviews with key individuals were conducted in order to help develop insights beyond the data gathered by the web survey. These interviews helped determine the impact of the meetings and clarify the instruments and conditions needed to improve participation processes. The questions aimed to collect information on the impact of the European Meetings on People Experiencing Poverty, on poverty-reduction policies, on civil society and institutional actors. The participation process was also evaluated. The interviews consisted of open questions and the respondents were encouraged to speak broadly and to emphasise what they saw as the most important issues. The questionnaire was treated as a guide from which the interview could deviate. Additional questions were used for different key individuals. In this way, the interviews were semi-structured (Bryman, 2004).

The experts interviewed included policymakers (namely, civil servants, commission officials, members of the Social Protection Committee, members of the cabinet of the ministers) (50%), the organizational team (25%) and representatives of relevant social NGOs (FEANTSA, Eurochild, ATD Fourth World) (25%). 83% of the key individuals were interviewed face-to-face in Belgium, with the remaining 27% being conducted by telephone.

All of the respondents participated in one or more of the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty.

The interviews were transcribed and prepared for analysis using the software program NVivo. In order to analyse the interviews, we started from a conceptual framework and a predetermined list of codes. During the coding process, these codes could change in light of information emerging from the interviews and the open questions. After open coding, the codes were developed further into axial codes. We also used a schedule to order the large quantity of information (Bryman, 2004; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The reporting of the results contains quotations from the interviews, by way of illustration of key points. These quotations are displayed using an italic font and a border. To guarantee the anonymity of the interviewees, we do not use their names.

1.4. Case studies

Besides the interviews with key individuals, we also conducted in-depth interviews in five case-study countries. The five chosen case-study countries were Belgium, Poland, Lithuania, Italy and Norway. The different case studies were selected in consultation with the research project's steering group. The main selection criteria were the variety of networks and experiences of participation. The cases show participation practices in different contexts.

The data collection consisted of preparatory work by the national coordinators of the EAPN delegations, followed by fieldwork by the central research team that visited each of the countries. In each country, the national coordinator wrote a brief report, which included a questionnaire designed for the purposes of this case study. This was completed with as much participation from delegates to the former European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty (people experiencing poverty, politicians, etc.) as was possible. Each report also described the process that was followed in order to complete the report itself.

Alongside these short reports by the national coordinators, two researchers visited the countries with the intention of proposing additional questions, of interviewing additional individuals, of putting information in the larger framework of the research, of detecting missing information, of enhancing the comparability of the interviews and to gain additional insights. The visits also served as a 'quality check' in order to improve the comparability and completeness of the information on the policy context and participation methods. There were at least three interviews per field visit: one interview with the EAPN network (with the person who completed the questionnaire and delegates from previous meetings), one interview with a member of the Social Protection Committee, and one interview with a local or national policymaker or an NGO involved in the fight against poverty. Each visit lasted two days at most.

OASeS analysed the short reports and the interviews conducted in the case-study countries using the same qualitative techniques employed for the expert interviews. The information gathered in the case studies is integrated throughout the report and is used to illustrate the findings in the research.

1.5. Validity and limitations of the research

Because of the limited time and means available, we were not able to interview more experts or to visit more countries. It was also impossible to take in the whole national contexts of the case study countries during visits of only a couple of days. However, in order to enhance the validity of the research we used multiple techniques and methods. We used open and closed questions, and qualitative and quantitative analysis methods. This reduces the chance of reaching invalid conclusions. Besides the multiple techniques employed, we interviewed several respondents and also experts who were well aware of the survey subjects. We also visited different countries with a different cultural background, and in these different countries we interviewed people experiencing poverty, representatives of NGOs and policymakers in such a way that we could complete and improve each other's stories. In this way, we created a double check on the research.

2. Results

2.1. General impact

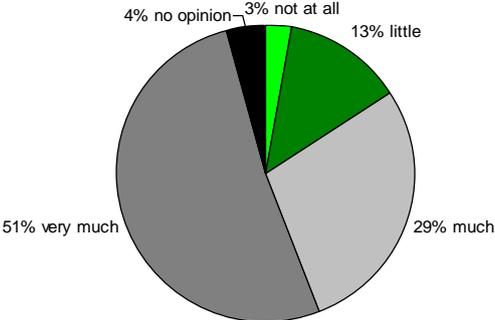
2.1.1. Percentages of all respondents

The meetings stimulated the idea that the situation of people experiencing poverty should be clarified and explained to people who do not know what it means to experience such poverty. More than half of the respondents declared that the meetings contributed ‘very much’ to this. Only 16% of the respondents reported negative answers in terms of the contribution of the meetings to making the situation of people experiencing poverty more understandable.

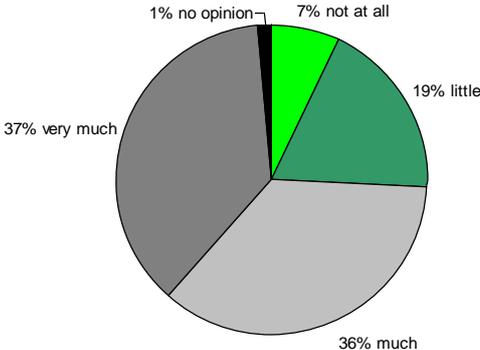
The meetings also contributed to more knowledge on the struggle against poverty. Around 73% of the respondents declared that the meetings contributed ‘much’ or ‘very much’ to their knowledge. However, approximately 26% thought this was not the case.

Despite the expansion of their knowledge, only 59% of the respondents actually act differently as a result of the meetings.

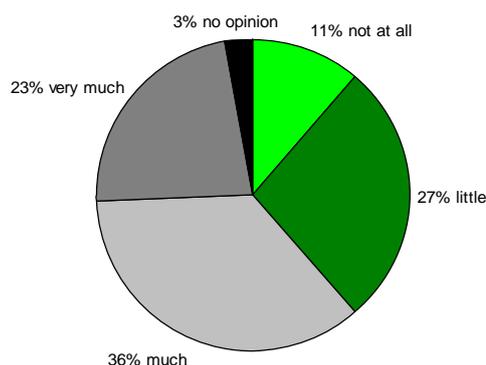
Did the meetings help you to understand the situation of people experiencing poverty?



Did you learn something (more) about the fight against poverty?



Do you act differently in the fight against poverty after these meetings?



2.1.2. Percentages by category of respondent

Among the respondents, all members of **the organizing team and the academics** declared that the meetings helped them to understand the situation of people experiencing poverty better. All members of the organizing team declared that they better understood the situation of people experiencing poverty due to the meetings. Furthermore, approximately 14% also learned ‘a little’ about the struggle against poverty. 57 % of the organizing team stated that they had acted differently after the meetings. Half of the academics declared that their knowledge improved and that they act differently as a result of the meetings.

93% of the **policymakers** declared that they understand more of the situation of people experiencing poverty and more than 80% said that they learned more about the struggle against poverty and acted differently after the meetings. Only 14% learned nothing and do not act differently.

In contrast to the policymakers, 17% of the **NGO representatives** found that the meetings contributed only ‘a little’ to their understanding of the situation of people experiencing poverty, with 58% declaring that the meetings contributed ‘very much’ to their understanding. Approximately 29% thought that the meetings did not contribute or only contributed ‘a little’ to their knowledge about the struggle against poverty. 46%, however, declared that the meetings contributed ‘very much’ to this knowledge. Approximately 46% of the NGO respondents said that they acted differently after the meetings.

Around 21% of the **people experiencing poverty** learned ‘nothing’ or ‘little’ about the situation of other people experiencing poverty. Those percentages are higher than those of the NGO representatives. 25% of the people experiencing poverty learned ‘nothing’ or ‘little’ about the struggle against poverty. In contrast to the NGO representatives, a majority of the people experiencing poverty acted differently after the meetings (58%).

Summary per category

	Policy makers	NGOs	People Experiencing Poverty	Organizing team
Better understanding of poverty	93%	58%	79 %	100%
Acting differently after meetings	80%	46%	58%	57%

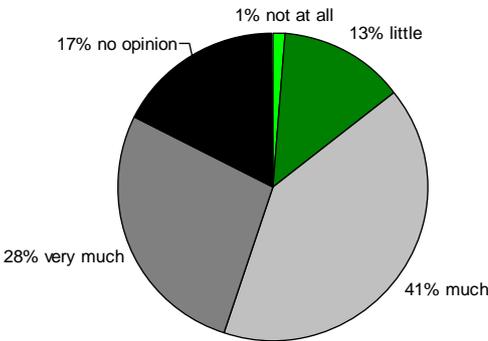
2.2. Impact on people experiencing poverty

2.2.1. Percentages of all respondents

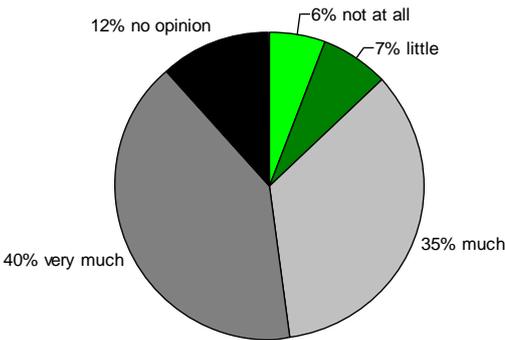
69% of the respondents are convinced that the meetings had a large impact on the personal development of people experiencing poverty.

The meetings stimulated to a large extent a sense of solidarity amongst people experiencing poverty. Approximately 75 % of the respondents agreed with this assessment. 40% rated this sense of solidarity as ‘very strong’.

Did the meetings contribute to a personal development of people experiencing poverty?



Did the meetings stimulate a sense of solidarity between people experiencing poverty?



2.2.2. Percentages by category of respondent

Of the **people experiencing poverty**, 88% noted personal development; around 13% did not. Only 17% of the people experiencing poverty noted no contribution to solidarity. Approximately 58% pointed to even ‘very much’ solidarity and 25% noted ‘much’ solidarity.

The **organising team** and the **NGO representatives** were more critical. Within the organizing team, 71% spoke of personal development and 57% of solidarity (40% had no opinion).

Within the NGOs, 50% believed that the meetings lead to personal development of people experiencing poverty, and approximately 75% said there was more solidarity.

All of the **policymakers** believed the meetings contributed to the personal development of the people experiencing poverty and built a feeling of solidarity. All **academics** believed in this personal development, although one of the two academics doubted the existence of improved solidarity.

2.2.3. *Information beyond the statistics*

The respondents added several examples of the positive impact of participation in the meetings on people experiencing poverty. Personal development is an individual process, which means that it depends very much on that individual. It is hard to measure the exact degree of impact the meetings had in terms of personal development or in escaping from poverty. Besides, the impact of the meetings goes beyond the individual participant. Often, the effects extend to those who were not present at the meetings. Participants share experiences and methods of participation with their community and gain a stronger position in that community or in their country.

One of the participants from the Lithuanian delegation recorded the meetings with a camera and put this video on the internet. He **spread his experience** of the meetings throughout his community and also went to seminars and neighbourhoods to inform them about his experiences. The organization that coordinates the participation of the Lithuanian delegation has also tried to inform communities about the meetings. In this way, they have attempted to create a **chain of information** (people who inform each other).

2.2.3.1. *Personal merits*

The meetings provide **emotional support** for people experiencing poverty and this protects them against **loneliness**. These people encounter other people in similar situations, and realize that their experiences are shared. People experiencing poverty found it very positive that they could tell their personal stories, which provided a form of **emotional relief**. For some of them, it was the first time in their lives that they had the feeling of being heard. This made them more aware of their potential impact, gave them **more confidence in policies** and policymakers and stimulated their involvement in policymaking.

“The meeting made people more aware of the real impact, new issues, and deeper understanding. It implied an emotional motivation factor which helped actors to feel committed and more directed in their actions.”

The people experiencing poverty experienced **more confidence, more engagement, more self-consciousness, more self-esteem, change, and development of their self-image, self-respect and self-knowledge** as a result of the meetings. They felt proud and recognized. In this way, they became more developed and optimistic. Their newly gained self-knowledge later spurred them to take more initiative and to seek solutions to problems. The people experiencing poverty became more **open-minded, less self-pitying** and more grown-up.

“I am stronger and more sure of myself.”

People experiencing poverty can also express themselves in an immaterial way (with creative constructions). They saw that their problems were recognized and placed into a

broader context. In the meetings, people are for a moment removed from their situation of poverty and can take a clearer look at things.

Many of the participants felt honoured to be able to attend the meetings. Many of them were appointed as some sort of **ambassador** for their country and, as a result, they obtained a certain **status** in their home countries. They became part of the 'European process'. The participants are sometimes **interviewed by local media**. Participation thus gives them the feeling that they have done something extraordinary. They feel like they have contributed to something and that they are listened to.

The fact that the delegates were treated as '**experts**' able to offer input for practices and programmes relating to poverty reduction reinforced their self-confidence and encouraged them to continue their engagement in the fight against poverty.

In the Italian case study, it was evident that, before the meetings, people experiencing poverty were never treated as experts. Now, those present are recognized as experts who can give advice to NGOs on how to improve participation in their organizational structures.

2.2.3.2. Solidarity

By gathering during the meetings, people experiencing poverty realized that poverty and social exclusion are present all over Europe and transcend their own situations. They do not look solely to their own situation as the most severe situation that exists, but become aware that there are many other problems and people suffering from even worse poverty. At the meetings, they discovered similarities between people experiencing poverty in all countries, and their common goals. The fact that poverty exists everywhere, and that many problems appear to be similar, causes a feeling of **solidarity** among the participants.

"I always felt secure, surrounded by solidarity and understanding."

This solidarity made them feel that they were not alone in their situations. The people experiencing poverty also took care of each other and wanted to help each other. They felt strong together and there were even true **feelings of friendship**. In their countries of origin, there is also a sense of solidarity because of the preparation process.

"For example, in Belgium, new relations were formed between French and Dutch-speaking Belgians. Before, contacts across this linguistic divide had been minimal."

This solidarity was also very tangible during the meetings' **informal moments**. Solidarity is conceived of as very important because of the fact that it empowers countries, fights egocentrism, makes differences between countries smaller, creates alliances, generates greater support and makes people feel stronger.

"Because Norway is not a member of the EU, the value attached to this solidarity there was even bigger than in other countries."

Because other people at the meetings highlight the same problems, participants realise that they are not 'crazy' or deviant. They find support for contesting their situations, even if other people tell them that these situations are normal.

“I understood that my problems are not mine alone or those of the people who live in my Roma camp, but are shared by many others.”

“I saw that poverty has many different faces and that only by seeing them together, we can really fight against it.”

The meetings also provide a kind of **European identity**. Besides the national level, the people experiencing poverty participating in the meetings are now also more aware of the European level. However, there are two sides to this coin. On the one hand, the experiences encouraged a sense of **affiliation or membership of a broader community** facing shared problems, but, on the other hand, knowledge of the greater European dimensions of poverty risks stimulating **a sense of resignation and helplessness** in the face of such vast problems. However, the experience of the meetings was mostly positive. People felt at home and included. They had the chance to meet other people with whom they shared life stories and political passions, and they also felt more included.

Typical in the Polish case study was that people spoke in public several times about the usefulness of the meetings so that they could help and encourage other people experiencing poverty. The Polish people experiencing poverty also wanted to participate in order to help others.

2.2.3.3. *New relationships*

People with very different experiences of poverty met each other and saw that they had much in common. They built **partnerships, networks and new relationships**.

“At UK level, two delegates from ATD Fourth world took part in 2007, and then..even the people they went with from the UK with another organization that they had not known before and they’ve maintained those links since then. So, now in the UK, we work with these other organizations and the delegates that took part, they go to their meetings and it creates links.”

The new contacts or relationships were sustained by e-mail and through **social networking sites** such as Facebook. Using these sites, information was exchanged. The people experiencing poverty also felt **less isolated**.

The Lithuanian participants are still communicating with people from Germany and Greece. They ask each other questions, keep each other informed and discuss various topics. With their sense of solidarity, they feel as one broad community.

2.2.3.4. *A learning process*

The meetings were seen as **a learning process**, by which people experiencing poverty could learn from each other, but also from policymakers. They learned how public policies are developed and about policy language. The participants learned more about themselves, learned more about poverty and social exclusion, learned about new topics and even gained further insights into subjects they already knew about. They learned from the experiences of other people experiencing poverty and broadened their knowledge of the national and European level. They were able to make comparisons. The people experiencing poverty were surprised that a lot of poverty problems were the same all over Europe. They also picked up

information through the exchange of experiences between participants from different countries.

“I have a vast background of experiencing poverty and it was an honour to attend the 8th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty and learn about what other countries are doing to eliminate poverty there.”

They also learned to take the floor, to evaluate situations and processes and to think more structurally. Furthermore, they learned to respect each other, to engage in dialogue and to speak in front of an audience. People experiencing poverty were made aware of their **(social) rights**. They also learned about how people experiencing poverty can deal with certain situations and institutions. During the meetings, good practice relating to participation and information was exchanged.

“Now I know my rights, but my proprietor is still breaking the rent, though I know it is not legal, but I still cannot help even when all is said and done, because then I end on the streets or in an even worse situation.”

People also learned to speak with more knowledge. They became more aware of policy discussions at different levels and about civil organizations. For example, they developed the insight that **influencing policies costs time** and that participation is a long-term process. They gained more energy with which to fight poverty and also learned how to analyse situations, problems and poverty itself. They looked at problems within **a broader scale** and more realistically. They became less focused on their own problems and more focused on the general problem of poverty.

Some of the participants were also **encouraged to learn more** and improve themselves in terms of participation. *Some Polish and Lithuanian delegates* wanted to learn English, others became more informed about European policies, etc. One of the *Norwegian participants* became so interested in Europe and European policies, that he educated himself about the EU by using the internet. *The Italian respondents* pleaded for continuing work on participation and self-help groups for people experiencing poverty.

“It's difficult, but the European meetings taught us that it is possible. And today we have more tools.”

Several respondents emphasised diversity as a positive element for their personal development.

“I was really impressed by the richness and diversity of participation at the meeting. In my group there were representatives of single parents, Roma society, illegal migrants and old women's network, to mention some of them. Very inspiring!”

The variety of circumstances presented and the participation of marginalised cases such as those of severely disabled persons, ex-convicts, etc., opened participants' eyes and gave them a more inclusive vision.

The Italian respondents also considered it very important to learn about models of social integration, such as 'active inclusion', that have proven to be effective in other countries and that could be transferred to Italy.

The meetings created awareness that poverty is not an individual problem but rather a **societal problem**. The participants expressed not so much the fact that they have financial problems but more that they are victims of social exclusion or discrimination. It is society that creates these barriers. As such, the meetings created the feeling that people experiencing poverty are not different from other people in society, which made them feel **less stigmatised**.

“It’s not just an individual blamed situation, it gives the chance to see what are the underlying factors to do with the politics, to do with technologic situations, (...) all of these things having combined to create a situation that is not just their own personal fault.”

In Belgium, the people experiencing poverty realized even before the meetings that poverty is a societal problem, unlike *in Poland*, where some of the participants still consider poverty to be an individual problem, even after participating in the meetings. This difference may partly be explained by the long tradition in Belgium of people experiencing poverty gathering in associations and discussing poverty and poverty policies.

2.2.3.5. *New skills*

The people experiencing poverty learned also several new skills. They have become more able **to handle difficult situations**. The meetings also helped some of the respondents to overcome fear and **to speak in public** about poverty (even if they are misunderstood from time to time). Some of the respondents learned to talk to journalists and learned to employ more political language.

“I was never afraid to speak. The first times I may not have been very clear, but then I became more and more sure of myself and stopped worrying about making mistakes.”

“We now express ourselves better with political words and we explain ourselves better and understand better when others speak.”

“If we want to be heard, if we want to have influence, we have to speak in the name of all and not just ourselves.”

2.2.3.6. *New experiences*

The people experiencing poverty attending the meetings became aware of new realities, experiences, information and got to see other aspects of poverty. Many of these people had never travelled before, so the meetings were incredible experiences for them. It was also an experience to be in another country and to be confronted with the unique setting of the meetings (the conference rooms, hotel, etc.).

Some of the Lithuanian people experiencing poverty got to experience being in a city for the first time (because they came from rural regions) and were, again for the first time, listened to by politicians. Their worldview broadened significantly.

“Before, I never met anyone from outside my neighbourhood. I had never travelled before – not even in Bari.”

Also for many Italian delegates, the European and national meetings were “the first time”: the first time they could speak freely, the first time they met with so many others on an equal footing, the first time they had a chance to explore an issue, to discuss it and discover how many solutions they were capable of finding if only they had a moment to reflect on things.

Many of the Italian delegates saw politicians sit down and listen during the whole meetings for the first time, “even ministers”. The lack of formality, the lack of bodyguards, the fact that politicians from other countries were ready to listen and did not leave once they finished making their interventions, that they stayed to eat with the participants, gave people experiencing poverty a much more positive view about politicians. This is especially the case when such participation is not really practised in their own countries.

2.2.3.7. *Engagement*

Although it varies from country to country (the older EU Member States have a longer tradition of participation), after the meetings several people experiencing poverty became more active and engaged in policy discussions. Because of their status as ‘ambassadors’ of their countries, they became encouraged to go to other meetings, and tell others about their experiences, problems and solutions. Some of them even went to round tables and congresses or were active at the national level.

One of the Lithuanian respondents said that, following after the meetings, he watches, follows and analyses legal issues. He investigates why taxes are increasing, pensions are cut and why micro-enterprises are not stimulated. Another person mentioned that he wishes to participate in charity projects and to help his neighbours. Yet another participant said that he participated more in conferences and discussions with politicians. Another was motivated to keep on seeking information regarding poverty policies. In general, they became more active in terms of participation at various different levels. Nevertheless, there was also a respondent who mentioned that he did not have the strength and the belief to influence politicians.

2.2.4. *Spin off*

Because of the meetings, the **material living conditions** of some individuals improved. Because of their personal development, some people found work, other people improved their housing situations and one woman started a gardening project in her hometown after she had seen the many parks in Brussels. She became much more active than before the meetings. Also, the **membership of EAPN** made this empowerment possible. People became stronger through their membership, because they can count on a permanent source of support in case of difficulties.

Two Polish people experiencing poverty indicated that they found work because of the sense of empowerment given by the meeting. Another person experiencing poverty said the meetings resulted in him being more involved in policy decisions. He even consulted an ombudsman. Several of the Norwegian respondents reported that they had found jobs. They were empowered, gained more confidence and knowledge and learned to use their experience to help others. They were employed by NGOs (e.g. Welfare Alliance), felt more socially included and were very enthusiastic about

working. One respondent said that after seven years he finally found work, because of the meetings.

There are, however, also **negative effects** of the meetings for people experiencing poverty. Because of the meetings, some people experiencing poverty seem to minimise the importance of their own situations. Through broadening their horizons, they could contextualise their own situations, which mitigates the apparent severity of their problems. People see that situations of poverty exist in many other countries and they cease considering their own situation to be the worst. On the other hand, people realize what their own country is doing well and what it is doing badly. They gain insights into what governments could do better. Sometimes, they also feel ashamed of their own politicians because they do so little about participation and poverty.

Often people experiencing poverty have unrealistic expectations, which can hinder their development. Bad preparation or participation problems can also hinder them in their development.

“What might be a bit problematic with these meetings is that it raises expectations for the participants because they think: I am going to talk.. I am going to go to Brussels, I am going to speak there about my problems, the policymakers will listen to me and this will change something... While it is, especially, I think, for newcomers, a very empowering experience, for people that have participated over a longer period of time, and who have developed expectations about these meetings. They think there should be an outcome of these meetings at some point. I think, for them, it’s more frustrating.”

An Italian policymaker mentioned that the meetings could have negative emotional effects, because participation could be stigmatising. In encouraging people experiencing poverty to participate, they are defined as poor, and this can be stigmatising. The Italian people experiencing poverty, on the other hand, consider themselves as experts in poverty and that is the reason that they want to be consulted. They say the meetings demonstrate that they are more than simply people experiencing poverty.

Despite the positive impact of the meetings on people experiencing poverty, we must be aware that not all people experiencing poverty could overcome their problems:

“For a lot of people I know, and I have followed up for years, yes, the meetings were really a starting point for a new development. For others unfortunately... It was not because the problems and the difficulties they had to face were too heavy for them and I will not say that the meetings provoked an increase of their problems. I've heard, I've been informed that some of former participants... died or committed suicide.”

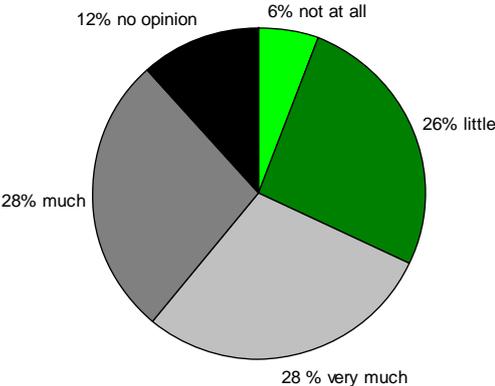
One of the respondents indicated that the meetings had the most influence on the personal development of new participants. Another respondent wrote that personal empowerment and growth goes hand-in-hand with the number of meetings they participated in. One of the Lithuanian delegates, who was very active at the local level, had problems participating at the European level because it was so overwhelming. He needed to participate a second time.

2.3. Impact on civil society organizations and institutions

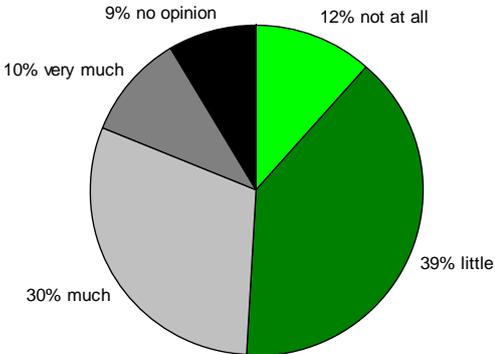
2.3.1. Percentages of all respondents

About 56% of all respondents reported that the meetings were useful for the civil society, whereas 32% declared this not to be the case. Only 41% of respondents thought civil society was stimulated by the meetings to fight poverty, with 52% doubting this. Approximately 51% were not convinced that the meetings have influenced public debate; 30% spoke about some influence.

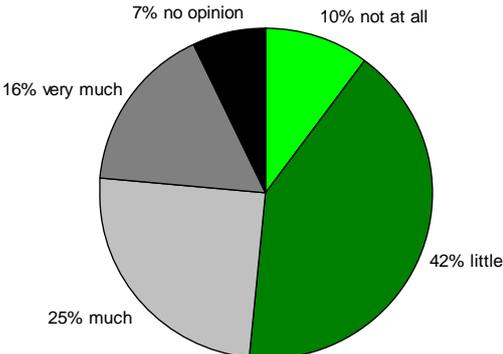
Were the meetings useful for institutional/civil society actors?



Did the meetings stimulate the public debate about the fight against poverty?



Did the meetings stimulate institutional/civil society actors to fight poverty?



2.3.2. Percentages by category of respondent

2.3.2.1. On the influence on civil society actors and their fight against poverty

The **NGO representatives** were most negative about the influence of the meetings on civil society actors. Approximately 46% had little or no belief in any impact; 41% were more positive. Regarding the influence on NGOs fighting poverty, 46% believe there was an influence and 46% do not. **People experiencing poverty** themselves are also critical: 60% believe in an impact on civil society actors but 47% gave negative responses to the question about the influence on poverty reduction by NGOs. **Policymakers** have a far more positive image: 77% observed an impact on the civil society actors and another 77 % stated that they believe that the meetings had an impact on the fight against poverty by NGOs. In both cases, more than 30% of the policymakers talked about a big impact. Of the **organizing team** respondents, 59% appear to believe in the existence of an impact on civil society actors. However, 43% think the meetings did not encourage the fight against poverty.

2.3.2.2. On the impact on public debate

Just as with the impact on the **civil society actors**, **policymakers** are most positive about the influence of the meetings on public debate. Approximately 69% believe that public debate has been stimulated. This is in contrast with the **people experiencing poverty**, where a majority of 33% stated that they felt the meetings have had little or no impact on public debate. Of the **NGO representatives**, 54% believe that public debate has not been stimulated, whereas 33% believe it has. Amongst **the organizing team**, 43% believe the meetings to have had an impact on public debate.

Summary of results per category

	Policy makers	NGOs	People Experiencing Poverty	Organizing team
Impact on civil society actors	77%	41%	60%	59%
Impact on public debate	69%	33%	33 %	43%

2.3.3. Information beyond the statistics

In conducting the interviews with experts, it became clear that the process of the impact on organizations is complex and dual. Because of the growing commitment and involvement of the National Networks, the meetings and the participation of people experiencing poverty at both the European and local level has become more and more advanced.

Because of the meetings, organizations are motivated to stay active in the field of poverty reduction and the participation of people experiencing poverty. The meetings are useful for **agenda setting**. They give EAPN a structure **to lobby** and to push issues about poverty and participation on to the political agenda, but also on to the agenda of other NGOs and civil society actors.

The meetings made poverty and participation issues more visible, which stimulated organizations and networks to promote better living conditions. It was not only EAPN that became stronger. Other organizations and networks were motivated, because they saw the good practice of organizations in other countries. In this way, they were encouraged to push issues on to national agendas.

The Italian respondents also pointed out that, thanks to the awareness-raising process that the national and European meetings generated, many national organizations of people experiencing poverty are increasingly seeking to promote the voices of the disenfranchised, developing strategies aimed at increasing the visibility of poverty.

2.3.3.1. Foundation of new organizations

The European meetings resulted in the development of civil society in some countries. At first, the meetings worked with independent individuals and organizations, but these organizations gradually formed networks, even in the new European Member States, which was not obvious. Indeed, they do not have a tradition of organising themselves and developing a civil society. The meetings made the **foundation and formation of several organizations and National Networks** possible. Some these new NGOs were formed through collaboration between existing NGOs.

The networks that became members of EAPN did so because they could no longer afford to operate only as local organizations. They needed to become structured and united at a national and European level.

2.3.3.2. Partnerships between organizations and governments

The meetings have contributed to more **direct dialogue in the EU Member States** and to increased recognition of networks and their work. In some countries, more consultation round tables, councils, networks and other forms of involvement have been organized at the national level as a result of the meetings. There is, however, still the need for support and subsidy, not only at the European, but also at the national level.

The meetings provide solidarity between the national delegations and NGOs. At the same time, however, the meetings tend to enhance solidarity within countries themselves.

For example, in Belgium the regional networks (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) already existed and a Belgian network was developed. The European meetings formed an opportunity for this network to deepen its work and establish an intensive exchange of experiences between the different regional networks. The European meetings were also one of the reasons why the Belgian government gave grants to the Belgian network to prepare policy documents.

The meetings contributed to the fact that EAPN and ATD Fourth World are now consulted in the context of Polish government social policies. The Belgian government has a longer tradition of participation and often asks the umbrella associations (national and regional networks) for advice about certain topics. Before, they needed to search for an organization as dealing with the topic at hand, but now they can ask the national network to find such an organization. The national network then deals with this question internally and consults its members, to give advice to the government. Because of this partnership with the

government, the position and influence of the Belgian network increased. The network needs to gather all of the information from its members and organizations, which requires a lot of organization from this sector.

The Belgian network became more professional. They produce materials, policy files and documents which policymakers can use. Some of these recommendations have even been taken up by the SPC, this is on energy poverty. The SPC gained an extra information source with which to influence the European Commission and the Council. It is possible that the meetings also create such a processes and funding in other countries. Because of this good preparation, the network is taken serious.

“I mean I think it’s mainly the civil society that has the knowledge and the experience in being able to engage and involve people experiencing poverty on a long-term basis, so for that it needs to be a partnership between the national authorities, and the NGOs, civil society to enable this to happen.”

2.3.3.3. National meetings

Some of the National Networks have started to organize **local meetings** in which people experiencing poverty can participate. When the networks and organizations had enough means and funding, they started to organize transnational meetings and appointments. The European meetings do not only lead to national participatory processes, but this is a reciprocal process. National dialogue meetings also provide better preparation for, and better participation in, the European meetings.

The meetings also encouraged Lithuanian NGOs (HEIFER in partnership with other partner organizations such as the Red Cross, Caritas, etc.) to organize national meetings in which people experiencing poverty can participate. In order to organize these meetings, guidelines from EAPN were used. Because of the European meetings, these national meetings have become bigger. The Lithuanians also try to involve policymakers.

In Italy, the national meetings demanded a lot of research, analysis and work. 40 people were present at these three-day meetings, (people experiencing poverty, social workers, local civil servants, policymakers, etc.) and they discussed European topics. They worked in workshops and objectives were set out. The conclusions of these meetings are summarised in an extensive report.

2.3.3.4. Empowerment of organizations

Networks became stronger, more active, more committed and more prepared as a result of the meetings. The National Networks and local NGOs got more invites by the press and their commitment increased. There were also contacts between individual journalists and NGOs. Several NGOs have tried to find a balance between being a strong NGO and engagement with people experiencing poverty. The meetings have shown them that this is possible.

The NGOs see the European meetings as good practice and want to use them to influence policies to the point that “our politicians and decision-makers apply the method of the European meetings at home and therefore ensure the involvement of those directly involved”. Through the meetings, the NGOs have also learned about differences between, and good practices in, different countries.

The NGOs present now think less as clients and are more able to empathize with people experiencing poverty. The involvement of social operators has helped to break down some barriers. Thanks to the European and national meetings, it has been possible for the operators **to put themselves in 'other people's shoes'**, i.e. to better understand their clients. This approach has been useful in terms of increasing the operators' understanding of those living in poverty.

"During all the meetings we have created a network of people and organizations that pulls the strings of the discourse on this issue and supports people who approached the CILAP (Italian EAPN). On more than one occasion the group and the network were able to support projects of emigration of young unemployed graduates who moved from the South - at times with their families - in central Italy and finally started to work."

For the majority of the respondents, the meetings have encouraged organizations to strengthen the participation of people experiencing poverty in their associations. But the feeling is that this is the beginning of a very long journey, which takes place in a national setting in which citizens' participation in political life is very low and continues to decline. The general feeling is that direct participation by people experiencing poverty is proceeding very slowly. While progress has been slow, this is a result of the overall national situation rather than deficiencies in the efforts made so far, which have produced far greater results than was initially expected.

"It is progressing, albeit slowly. We are increasingly involved as 'experts' in participation in conferences and meetings. It is important that these meetings are not only attended by the people who coordinate these activities within the CILAP (Italian NGO) but also by us."

It takes years of work to fight against poverty, as history has shown. The meetings are a reasonable, inspiring tool with which to keep NGOs going.

2.3.3.5. *Organizations gain more knowledge about poverty*

The meetings are useful for organizations, because they can always learn more about the situation of people experiencing poverty.

"I think it does have some impact on anytime you're listening, and joining a room and listen to people experiencing poverty talking about situation."

"To discuss issues with people from other European countries, you know, I mean, it's a very sort of empowering experience for the organizations as well, and you get ideas, you hear about what's happening in other countries, you create networks..."

Norwegian NGOs found new information, topics and arguments to campaign with. They learned a lot about the EU and about new lobbying material. As a result of the meetings, the Norwegian EAPN was introduced to the concept of minimum income. They encountered countries where there is a minimum income system (e.g. Belgium and France). Now, the Norwegian EAPN has a campaign about the minimum income, with examples drawn from other countries.

The European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion is being used to give information on the European dimension in Norway, because this dimension is less visible there.

The Polish delegates mentioned that through the membership of EAPN, NGOs were encouraged to prepare, analyse and support the meetings, but also to defend the policy advice of the (reports of the) European meetings.

The members of the Belgian delegation brought consideration of Europe into the National Network and other NGOs. Before the meetings, these organizations were more focused on the local level and often ignored the European level.

2.3.3.6. Organizations gain expertise

Thanks to the efforts on the issue of the participation of people experiencing poverty, today CILAP (the Italian EAPN) is considered an **'expert'** on such matters. They have been invited many times to participate in debates, lectures, symposia, conferences and some radio and television shows. This increased interest may be explained by the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and the many events organized by civil society actors. According to some respondents, they are making information accessible for all.

The meetings informed and gave publicity to the Italian network, which consists at present of 35 to 40 organizations. Before the meetings, none of these organizations had had any experience with participation structures. Italy has a strong civil society, but did not have a strong tradition of direct participation by people experiencing poverty.

2.3.3.7. Relations and networks

EAPN has become a moral authority on poverty because of the meetings and because policymakers saw the serious national substructure of dialogue, the well-organized participation processes and the detailed proposals that were brought to the table. In this way, the meetings are for EAPN and the National Networks also a way to lobby. EAPN is invited to more European events and meetings than it was before

Organizations gained more impact and have been **strengthened in their lobbying** because they now work together with other organizations. They share and defend the same topics and position with many more organizations, and so their support base has become broader. These organizations can also say their position is supported all over Europe. An organization is stronger when it can put pressure by means of European documents, rather than by an individual dossier.

The meetings were also helpful because of several other reasons. Relations and networks between different organizations are formed because of the meetings.

There was, for example, an exchange between the Belgian and French delegation, who organized a meeting together. By doing so, they informed each other about how they communicate with policymakers and their way of working, as well as their structures and backgrounds. Between Germany and Belgium, there was much fraternization, but after the meeting there was no contact.

The Belgian Public Program Service for Social Integration contacted other countries in order to suggest creating new projects together. However, the results of these

contacts are not yet known. Again, more feedback for the whole group is appropriate. In order to create more partnerships, it would be appropriate to dedicate specific time and space to develop networks during the European meetings.

Some regional and National Networks have actually been created through cooperation between several NGOs. There has even been exchange between national and international organizations.

"I have known some of the preparations for the European meetings and you have many meetings between different types of organizations. So poverty organizations, migrant organizations, homeless organizations, and others. They meet each other to prepare and to follow up the meetings. So I think that's just a way so that people get to hear and build relations with the group who experience poverty for other reasons. "

"At the beginning these people came from different civil organizations and later on they did connect their willingness and partnership into one special organization, a partner to European EAPN, so they did make some institutional arrangements. "

"I remember there was this lone parent... single-parent organization from Greece introduced them to Eurochild, and they became a member of Eurochild." "At UK level, two delegates from ATD Four took part in 2007, and then.. even the people they went with from the UK with another organization that they had not known before and they've maintained those links since then. So, now in the UK, we work with this other organizations and the delegates that took part, they go to their meetings and it creates links. "

In Italy, the meetings resulted in the creation of a network of organizations working in the field. These organizations have worked over the years towards the preparation of the European events and took part in activities at the national level. The organizations involved are associations, social cooperatives, and local administrations.

At the meetings, participants meet new people who are also active in other organizations. This helps create a chain of relations between organizations. Smaller organizations also need to be contacted for the meetings, because they bring evidence of other realities. It would also be positive for these smaller, local organizations to be confronted with the broader world of the European Union. It could open their world and they could learn from this.

Despite the positive effects of networking, the Italian network needs to be careful about whom they work with, since there are also organizations with political goals, as well as mafia-supported or corrupt organizations or profiteers. This is why the Italian EAPN only works with volunteers. The meetings were also very important for CILAP (an Italian NGO), whose representatives learned and grew by accompanying and assisting the European delegates and promoting many initiatives.

In Poland, the meetings also stimulated several organizations to cooperate. The main reason was the recruitment of a delegation of people experiencing poverty that would participate at the European meetings. Some of the people experiencing poverty said, however, that more cooperation between the national NGOs is still required.

Lithuanian NGOs mentioned that they came in contact with other European NGOs, exchanged information about policies and compared good practice in different countries. These contacts, collaboration and membership of EAPN have empowered NGOs because

they now represent a bigger group of people beyond national borders. With several organizations fighting for the same cause, they can have more information, better capacities, more contacts and better administrative and secretarial support.

Another example of partnership is the 'Baltic Platform' (Norway has the presidency of this platform in 2010). In the Baltic States, participation is harder to achieve, Under the Soviet regime, 'direct democracy' meant something different than what is meant by the term today.

2.3.3.8. Summary

Some respondents said that **more civil society actors** needed to be invited to participate more actively in the European meetings. The meetings also need to involve more direct dialogue with people experiencing poverty. But there are also a lot of practical questions in terms of the size of the meetings and the numbers attending. If there were, for example, the representatives from the national parliament and the representatives from social partners from each country, then that would already add 100 people and the meeting may become too large to be practically feasible.

People experiencing poverty expect also more feedback from the participating NGOs. They should indicate why they are present at the meeting, what actions they undertake and reflect these at the meetings.

"Social European NGOs are present at the meetings, but we have never heard anything from them before and afterwards. What do they do and what is there added value? EAPN should provide us information about the European social NGOs do, what actions they have, so we can know this, for example by using a newsletter."

One NGO launched the question whether it is possible to have **a role delineation** for the participants of civil society organizations. In that way, they know better what they can do, when they may intervene, etcetera.

"For guests.... it's often not so clear their role.... to listen? respond?, propose solutions?. Maybe it would be good to break into smaller language groups to really work together on solutions more, to allow a more pro-active horizontal exchange. "

When the meetings were organized for the first time, **trade unions** were not so eager to deal with direct participation. They needed to learn that numbers are not the only important variable, but that participating with a small number of experts on poverty can be useful. That is to say, it can be useful to engage not on the basis of membership or of numbers, but on the basis of experience, input and content. The meetings raise awareness that participation is possible and people experiencing poverty are experts in poverty. There were, however, some experts who said they wanted to see more unions at the meetings. One interviewed expert thought that the meetings had less impact on trade unions and social partners because their presence at the meeting was limited.

In order to give more organizations the power to put participation higher up on the agenda, but also to empower the meetings and enhance their impact, one politician suggested it would be good if other NGOs (for example Eurochild, FEANTSA, ATD Fourth World) co-organized the meetings alongside EAPN. All these organizations are indeed working with

people who are excluded. A member of the Commission also stated that a greater plurality of NGOs at the meetings was desirable.

“You have also more plurality, let’s say, not only the same approach, you have more issues on the table, for example, now the EAPN, the minimum income is their priority, but for FEANTSA this perhaps is not the priority, and for ATD it’s extreme poverty, so, you know, there are three issues, okay, but equally important, but, you know, I think it would be a good idea to have everything on the table rather than, you know. (...) before 2007 and 2008, it was only EAPN, FEANTSA and ATD Fourth World, and since 2007 (...) I insisted with EAPN that at least the twelve networks that are funded under the social inclusion of progress are invited to these meetings, and this was done. But you know, I think, sometimes, in fact, these twelve, it’s not enough, because normally you should have had all the others who are big organizations, like the EDF, the disability forum, the EYSPD, all these organizations that are equally important.”

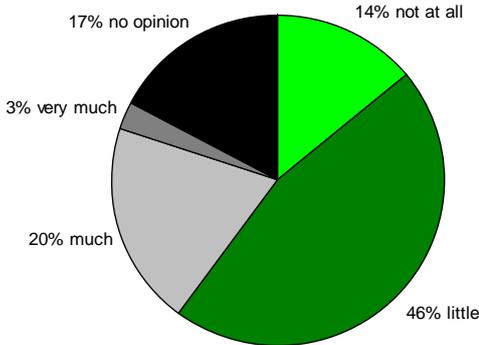
Another problem remains **the funding of NGOs**. Because of the lack of funding, it is hard for a network to grow. Because of this, practical tools such as organising a press conference are not available or realistic. It is also impossible to gain private funding, because private investors always want to see direct results.

2.4. Impact on policies

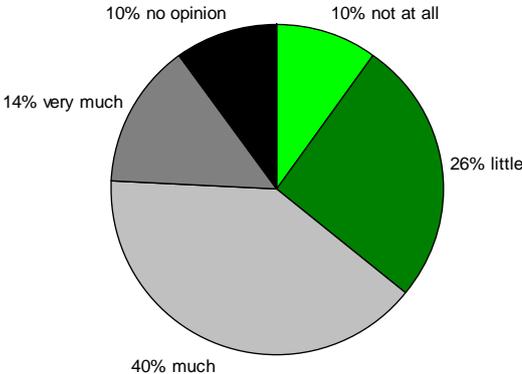
2.4.1. Percentages of all respondents

The European meetings do not only influence people experiencing poverty and to NGOs, it aims above all to make a difference in policy terms. In terms of policy impacts, the respondents are rather pessimistic about the meetings. Approximately 63% stated that they do not believe that the recommendations of the meetings were converted into policies; about 60% believe that the meetings have not even influenced policymakers. Of all the respondents, 54% thought that the meetings had an impact on the policy participation of people experiencing poverty.

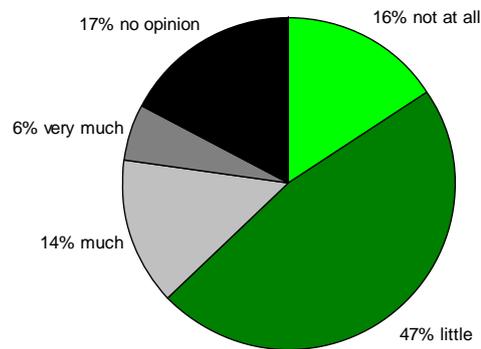
Did the meetings stimulate policy makers to fight poverty?



Did the meetings enhance policy participation of people experiencing poverty?



Are the discussions and recommendations of the meetings translated into policies?



2.4.2. Percentages per category of respondent

Most of **the policymakers** think the meetings had an effect on policy makers (approximately 43%) and that the advice of the meetings was followed by policymakers (approximately 50%). They also believe 'very much' that after the meetings there is more policy participation (approximately 71% stated this).

The other respondents are, unlike the policymakers, rather negative about the impact of the meetings on policies. Approximately 57% of **the organizing team** stated that they do not believe that there was an increase in lobbying (29 % have 'no opinion' about it). However, approximately 57% believe that there was increased participation in policymaking by people experiencing poverty.

Approximately 75% of the **people experiencing poverty** do not believe that anything happens with the policy recommendations of the meetings, and 83% do not believe that there has been an influence on policymakers. Only 46% are convinced that participation in policymaking has increased because of the meetings. **NGOs** are less suspicious about policy impacts. Approximately 50% believe that policymakers are not influenced and 62% do not believe anything has been done with the policy recommendations of the meetings. About 54% believe, however, that policies concerning participation have been influenced in a positive way.

	Policy makers	NGOs	People Experiencing Poverty	Organizing team
Impact on policy makers	43%	29 %	8%	14 %
More policy participation of people experiencing poverty	71%	54%	46%	57%
Impact on policies	50%	21 %	4%	14

2.4.3. Information beyond the figures

The quantitative results suggest that the meetings had little policy impact. Policymakers, however, do not agree with this proposition, and the qualitative aspect of the web survey shows that there are several positive policy outcomes to be mentioned.

The web survey focuses more on the impact of the meetings on policies. This impact is a complex and indirect subject. It is difficult to attribute the impact on policies directly to the meetings. The meetings are often only one cog in a larger system of lobbying and influence of other actors. Whether the meetings had any impact on national policies varies from country to country and depends on the commitment and political will of national politicians.

At the beginning, the meetings were an **initiative of the Belgian EU Presidency**, organized solely by the Belgian administration and cabinet. They had a long tradition of consulting people experiencing poverty. The support offered for the meetings by the Commission and EAPN started later. In the beginning there was some reticence from EAPN to get involved fearing that the meetings might be used to undermine the work of anti-poverty NGOs. They also thought that the meetings were a one-time event. Afterwards, they became advocates when the process became structured and repeated. In reality they wanted the same as the Belgian administration that organized the first event; it simply took longer before they were convinced of the fact that meetings would be structured events. Their suspicion was not entirely unjustified. The first editions of the meetings were less well-prepared, and not based on a broad network. They were more an exchange of individual stories of people experiencing poverty and were less thematic. Now, many groups work **thematically**, so they can have an elaborated message to send to politicians. Over the years, the individual stories became a smaller part of the meetings and **the political message** gained greater attention. The preparation is also more politicised. The delegations prepare a grounded opinion inspired by the agenda of the Presidency of the EU. The message has become more prepared, the core become more visible and the conclusions more political and formal. These **formal reports**, conclusions and advice are then brought to the Council meeting.

The impact of the meetings on policies must also be seen in **the wider context of European poverty reduction policies**. Commitments and laws on poverty are soft and not very visible. Most of the poverty policies (OMC, NAPs) are recommendations rather than hard law. Because of this, it cannot be expected that the meetings will result in any hard law. The EU cannot oblige Member States to do something about poverty. But the meetings contribute to **the recognition, acknowledgement, visibility and presence of participation**. When European poverty policies become stronger and more visible, the meetings may become more visible and may have a bigger potential impact.

“If the interest in the social part in Europe is improving and you have those meetings they will have more influence, you know, it's a bit of a chicken and egg situation. On the other hand, because you've had those meetings and all the other things, there is now a chance to have a slightly stronger process in Europe 2020 because they did part of raising awareness, and part of keeping the issue alive, and that's been useful. But its how bigger part they play, I suppose, to other things have played.”

An Italian policymaker also noted that the situation of direct participation always needs to be seen in the broader national context.

For example, in Italy billions of euro of cuts are being made in the administration. If there are cuts in the administration, fewer funds are available for NGOs, etc. and it becomes difficult to talk about new funding for the direct participation of people experiencing poverty.

One of the experts also said that the meetings are not structured to have a direct policy impact, because the people experiencing poverty themselves decide what will be discussed.

2.4.3.1. Agenda setting

The meetings have increased the **awareness at European and member-state level** of the value of participation by people experiencing poverty and improvements concerning participation in the Member States, as part of the wider social inclusion process. The meetings raise support for the 84 million people living under the poverty line. So, just the existence of the meetings is already very symbolic. It means that the participation of people experiencing poverty is seen as something important and it puts participation on the agenda. As such, the Presidency and Member States pay more attention to it.

“If I looked at the last ten years of the European process, I would say half of the issues where most progress has been made is probably not a particular policy area, but it's probably on the issues of participation. People are much more conscious that they should be doing something, really.”

“The big advantage of the meetings is: one, they happen and two: they are referred to.”

The meetings have created an atmosphere in which policymakers need to take account of people experiencing poverty, their experiences and their advice. People experiencing poverty have started to be recognized as experts. The meetings have also proved to be **an additional tool with which to keep poverty and participation on the agenda** by repeating, again and again, the message that poverty must be eradicated. They have brought new topics on to the European agenda. For example, attention was drawn to the problems of the Roma.

“The impact of meeting policymakers has helped to clarify the importance of key issues – e.g. access to adequate minimum income, access to services, energy poverty, and financial exclusion.”

“I think the meetings have contributed to raising awareness on poverty and 'social inclusion' issues; e.g., fuel poverty, homelessness (and reference in EU2020 even if not concrete targets yet).”

At the European level, the **issues of homelessness and housing, financial inclusion, participation, energy poverty, and poverty governance** have become a priority and were mentioned in documents. The meetings also helped to free certain topics from their taboos: for example, the situation of the Roma camps in Italy, drug use, homelessness or the fact that a lot of people experiencing poverty end up in prison. **Stereotypes and prejudices** can be corrected or refuted, and positive examples can also be given. The meetings show that people experiencing poverty are individual people with individual stories, who do not need to be treated as stereotypes.

“The meetings were one of the elements in an overall strategy to try to get poverty and social exclusion higher on the EU agenda. And this worked. There is a strong target proposal within the Europe 2020 agenda for the first time in twenty years. In twenty years I did not hear anything, even when they adopted the Lisbon strategy there was no real public debate of the Council and now there is a real discussion among prime ministers about the question of poverty and social exclusion whether you have a poverty target or not (...) Are the meetings a part of that chain? I think it is (...) I think it is one link in that chain that helps to push.”

“Official events like the round table and the opening ceremony, these sort of official events are useful to create a much more direct engagement. And last week I was just at the big conference of the Commission about active inclusion and homelessness and it was striking that there was – at least at the workshop I was engaged with – a much more direct voice of people directly experiencing poverty and you can see that they try to bring it in. (...) But you can see that there is a push forward on this question of participation.”

Several ministers of social affairs or social integration became more involved and interested in the participation process. Because of the meetings, contact between people experiencing poverty, organizations and politicians increased.

The meetings became more political and gained more **political status**. The meetings were organized by the Presidency and the Commission through which they got the recognition of policymakers, ministers, etc. The support of the Commission is a symbolic act that lent importance to the meetings. There was also **an institutional recognition** of participation and the fight against poverty. Each EU Presidency that organized the meetings was forced to do more about participation in their own country. Some of their national ministers were present at the meetings. Countries that held the Presidency paid more attention to the meetings. Also, public opinion was influenced more in these countries.

The place where the meetings took place, the Egmont Palace and the European Parliament building, create the image of an important meeting, which also contributes to their political impact. The meetings are taken seriously.

The terminology of the meetings, EAPN and the National Networks is employed by the European Commission in its active inclusion strategy of October 2008. In the documents of 2006, mention was made about minimum income, but in 2008 they used the terminology of EAPN and the National Networks (which is also used at the meetings). They mentioned an income for a dignified life, so people experiencing poverty could be included in society. They did not speak anymore about an income to survive, but about an income to participate in society. The European meetings also enhanced the visibility of the campaigns of EAPN and the National Networks.

2.4.3.2. Personal impact on policymakers

The meetings raised politicians' awareness and understanding of how important it is to reduce poverty. Politicians are now more open to issues of participation and poverty policies. Politicians are more involved in this issue, especially during 2010. It was also demonstrated that poverty is a global problem. By meeting people experiencing poverty, politicians can see that those people are not passive and that poverty is not their own

responsibility. The meetings made clear for the politicians present that people experiencing poverty cannot change their own lives, but need to be helped with structural changes.

Policymakers are **emotionally touched** by people experiencing poverty, who confront them with the reality of poverty. The visual moments at the meetings are often touching moments for the policymaker participants. The meetings also, therefore, have a **personal impact** on policymakers, and this in itself can have a policy impact. The meetings give a face to statistics, numbers and official reports. The policymakers that are present are also forced to think about poverty and the possibility of participation. High-level officials, the SPC, and others, who before never had direct contact with people experiencing poverty, were confronted at the meetings with people experiencing poverty who had very grounded opinions. The meetings improve understanding that poverty is not just situation to be blamed on individuals, as the underlying factors of poverty are shown. The politicians are not confronted with slogans but with real participation and the power this can entail. These policymakers share this experience with others, so the utility of participation becomes more widely understood. Officials from the Commission and the SPC became more driven and enthusiastic to fight poverty. They are encouraged to put the topics mentioned in the meetings on the EU and other political agendas.

One politician described it as follows:

“I was impressed by the depth of knowledge of the different issues at stake, and the different voices that exist at national level for this.”

Still, it needs to be mentioned that this influence is very individual and differs from person to person. However, the SPC, which is the main body for preparing advice on social issues, often seeks the advice of EAPN and other NGOs to formulate their advice to the Council and others. Because the opinion and recommendations of the EAPN are supported by the different National Networks, their weight is increased.

2.4.3.3. Information

One of the NGOs mentioned that the lack of direct participation is not a result of political unwillingness, but an effect of not knowing and understanding direct participation. Through the European meetings, politicians get acquainted with direct participation and with the possibilities it offers. The meetings inform politicians. They are now faced with more than statistics and can learn about the real experiences of people living in poverty. They can learn from the expertise and knowledge of these people. One of the respondents felt, however, that the European meetings are too focused on the participatory model of experience expertise, and pay too little attention to other participatory methods. Policy recommendations from people experiencing poverty are a necessary complement to political and scientific policy recommendations.

Through the meetings, politicians are confronted with the social impact of particular policies e.g. the liberalization of services. Some policymakers will no longer assume they know better than people experiencing poverty. The European meetings have led to a slow change in attitudes of policymakers and civil society actors.

“We see there is a charter to protect the European consumers and that energy poverty is brought under the attention by EAPN.”

2.4.3.4. *Contacts and networks*

During the lunches and informal moments, delegations and people experiencing poverty go to their national SPC members and politicians and ask them to cooperate and confer.

There were also contacts between SPC members, politicians and people experiencing poverty.

One SPC member mentioned that, by meeting people experiencing poverty, the statistics and documents on her desk became vivid. The meetings made poverty tangible.

Poverty is hard to measure and to define. This is why there is the need to listen to people experiencing poverty themselves. One cannot understand poverty without ever having listened to a person experiencing poverty. They have very clear ideas about what can be changed about their situations, even beyond borders.

Participation can be a reality-check for politicians. It increases their awareness of poverty, but at the same time they can examine the effects of their policies and policy proposals and double-check them with the daily reality of people experiencing poverty. For example, a Polish expert from the Statistical Planning Office stated that with 400 zloty, people could have all their basic needs. One of the Polish people experiencing poverty however, had different experiences and arguments (high energy costs, high rents, etc.) with which to prove that this was not the case.

“In terms of the impact on actors - being brought face to face with people experiencing poverty is an important reality check, and usually made people more aware of the real impact, new issues, and deepen understanding, as well as have an emotional motivation factor which helped actors to feel committed and more directed in their actions.”

“The politicians talk about poverty, while on the other side they take income away from the people who needed it the most, they do not see the poverty and they do not know poverty. It's not in their books. They do not have to live off a poor wages. They are not confronted with everyday's poverty, because their standard of living is beyond our daily sorrow.”

Delegations and politicians are confronted with the laws, measures, policies and good practice of other countries at the meetings. For example, debt advice, social housing, minimum income, etc. The meetings give politicians a view on what is realistic and the possibility to exchange good practice.

2.4.3.5. *References and mentions*

The meetings have helped to reinforce certain arguments. The **meeting report is quite often quoted in support of different policies** that the EU has argued for. The meetings are mentioned in European texts, articles, resolutions of the Parliament, conclusions of the European Council, etc. The conclusions of the meetings are passed around at the round table conference about poverty and social exclusion. Some of the conclusions of the conferences have been reported at the following Council of Ministers of social policy. Issues that were discussed at the meetings have gone on to become the topics of conferences and

were mentioned in key documents, papers about social coordination, documents by experts and follow-up items in the European Parliament. There has been, for example, a European conference about energy poverty. This topic was launched at the meetings. Even in meetings where people experiencing poverty are not present, they are referred to.

“I remember when I was in the Commission and I wrote the first joint report on social inclusion, after the first round table. I desperately tried to find examples of people who consulted anybody in drawing up their plan.”

Some SPC members often seek the advice of EAPN before making its recommendations to the Council of Ministers, because they know from the meetings that EAPN works via the experiences of National Networks all over Europe. For example, the SPC read a report of the Belgian network on energy poverty, looking for recommendations. The president of the SPC has already been present at the meetings for five years and has a key position in drafting speeches and texts and giving advice to the European Commission, etc. The SPC engages more frequently to NGOs in between the European meetings.

2.4.3.6. Links with other events and conferences

People experiencing poverty have also started to be invited to other European conferences and meetings. At the opening conference of **the European Year**, there was a plenary organized with people experiencing poverty. In the press, this issue was the most highlighted of the whole event. The link between **the round table on poverty and social exclusion** and the European meeting became more and more obvious by working with representatives of the European meetings that were present at the round table. The number of people at the round table will even be enlarged, their preparation will continue to become better and the links with the European meetings of the year before will be highlighted. Because of the approval of the presence of people experiencing poverty by the Presidency and the Commission, their presence can be extended to the future round tables. The meetings are also linked to the European **PROGRESS programme**.

It is, however, not always possible to let people experiencing poverty participate in other meetings because of language issues and the fact that the discussions are often of a very technical nature.

“We have another conference for example on child poverty coming up with the Belgian presidency (...) and they insist on having people living in poverty and social exclusion participating, because this is something to which Belgian Presidency is committed. And there are some colleagues who have been participating in these meetings and they say, this is not possible, because you have only people from countries that are speaking English or French, which is not very much representative, or otherwise is an alibi. First of all, because most of the people cannot express themselves, and then, because there will be a technical discussion and you have to have a whole preparation (...) We will have people experiencing poverty at the round table, so, I do not see why at every event you would need to have this, if this is not going to serve any specific purpose and would be not profitable neither for the people themselves nor for the other participants.”

2.4.3.7. *More policy pressure*

Every year, there is an increased focus and attention on the meeting itself and on what happened at the meetings. Attention on the national meetings of people experiencing poverty has also increased.

The impact on the people experiencing poverty was more empowerment and personal development. Because of this personal empowerment, people have become more active, which can lead to more policy influence.

"I participated in debates and conferences and the European experience that I have described has become an example of a good practice."

Despite the absence of concrete policy outcomes, the meetings put pressure on national authorities to encourage development of their poverty policies. National policymakers know that their policies will be criticised at a European meeting in the presence of other policymakers and stakeholders.

"There's a place in Europe where we can talk freely. And this, perhaps, begins to condition them."

Despite of this pressure, some respondents see the risk of a negative impact because of retaliation. They are afraid that the political class might feel provoked and therefore treat people experiencing poverty worse instead of better. If one wants to solve problems, one first needs to admit that there are problems, and a lot of politicians do not want to do this.

2.4.3.8. *European policies*

In the web survey, several positive examples of the impact of the meetings on European policies were given:

- The meetings were used in the EU as an example of how to work on participation.
- The Europe 2020 strategy includes poverty as a main issue.
- The 'European Platform against Poverty' has been included in the Europe 2020 strategy.
- Active inclusion was a topic at the two latest and at the next 'Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion'.
- People experiencing poverty got directly involved and could participate in several European conferences.
- The designation of 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion was influenced by the meetings.
- Plans have been made to create a commission to give policy advice about child poverty and well-being.

2.4.3.9. *National Networks and meetings*

Another remarkable policy result is that the meetings encouraged several Member States to have more participation, dialogue and similar national meetings of people experiencing poverty. National Networks have been founded because of the meetings and there is cooperation between various NGOs. Several respondents, however, indicated that the

meetings had not yet influenced their countries to develop national participation structures, meetings or dialogue. The European meetings and other national meetings can be a way to confront their governments with the possibilities of participation and put pressure on them to promote greater participation.

Examples of the impact of the meetings on national policies were also given. At the national level, people experiencing poverty and their organizations and networks gained a stronger voice. Because of the recognition of the European meetings, year after year, some National Networks have gained more importance at the national level. The meetings push permanently for more dialogue between national government and other actors. The meetings create a frame for participation and consultation. The importance and power of gaining expertise by experience is promoted by the meetings.

“In our internal analysis at EAPN we learn of more and more similar national processes happening and a tendency to institutionalise these national processes and to give them a certain weight in national policy making. Networks are less afraid to work with participation because of the experience at the EU meetings and there are strong dimensions of participative project and policy work.”

“On national level: policies implemented in the field of access to affordable housing and food as well as in the field of child care followed related recommendations at people experiencing poverty meetings, regular organization of national people experiencing poverty meetings.”

At the fourth meeting, the Luxembourg Presidency decided and communicated to the Council that each member state should develop a similar meeting at the national or regional level. Because of this official paper and recommendation, the awareness and will to convince national or regional authorities to engage in such processes has increased.

“I can remember when it was the Luxembourg Presidency. The Luxembourg policymakers involved in organising the meeting were sort of struck by everything that they heard and everything that they experienced and so maybe that had an impact.”

The meetings pointed national politicians to their social obligations.

“The reality is that most of the policy improvements need to be done on local and regional or national and regional level, it’s not going to be EU. But the meetings could have some influence on creating more pressure on Member States.”

In some countries, the meetings contributed to the recognition of National Networks and organizations and the creation of a national direct dialogue. This national support needs to be one of the outcomes of the meetings. Some of the National Networks got government support and/ or grants. For example, in Austria the preparation process won the support of the government.

Because of the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty, similar meetings were organized at the national level. For example, this was the case in Dublin, where a European Commission officer had organized a meeting about social inclusion. Because of the meetings, some of the national action plans speak about participation (for example in Ireland):

“I mean: Member States are required to undertake national action plans, that's part of the European process. Well, often the plans are not very good, but in a few countries, they were serious. And one of the things that have definitely improved is that in drawing up their national plans they were conscious in one part of the process, that they should consult more with people who are experiencing poverty as to what they see as a priority, in policy areas, and then what on particular policies. And that's happening more than it has happened at the beginning. But only in some countries. (...) The meetings created more pressure on Member States at national level, to have to build that into their own processes. “

In the UK, people experiencing poverty were more often invited to assist and advise ministries whose work concerns the social inclusion process.

Not only similar meetings were organized, but several countries started their own participation processes and involved people experiencing poverty in policy development.

In Belgium, it became evident that people experiencing poverty are consulted and take the floor. People experiencing poverty even spoke in parliament. There is always a coordinator present, next to the people experiencing poverty. The Belgian politicians know that talking with people experiencing poverty is a direct confrontation with another perspective on social facts. The Belgian network also had an input into the federal action plan against poverty. People experiencing poverty were involved, could discuss, had a voice and could coproduce policy reports. In return, the government expect well-prepared dossiers and documents from the people experiencing poverty and their coordinators.

It was a goal of the meetings that the national Member States should take their responsibilities for supporting the national preparation process and the follow-up seriously. In some countries, such as *Belgium and France*, there was already an established dialogue, but in other countries, such as the *UK*, consultation and a limited dialogue with people experiencing poverty started because of the meetings and the social inclusion strategy. Before, there was little or no engagement of the *UK* on this domain. The same situation occurred in *Germany and in Spain*. Some regions became more open to having an open discussion about participation. However, the participation processes were encouraged by the national governments of all countries. In *Greece*, the European meetings did not really influence participation in national policymaking. Because of their cultural history, in the new Member States it is more difficult to start the participation process. However, to have an influence on national politics, national meetings are necessary.

In Italy, a positive evolution has been identified regarding the Roma camps. During the seventh meeting in Brussels, in Ponticelli, a district of Naples, people set fire to the Roma camps in the area. The Italian delegation presented a petition asking the European institutions to condemn such behaviour. This petition, signed by all national delegations present at the meeting, was given to Commissioner Spidla. Respondents believe that this petition was one of many policy actions that drew the attention of the European institutions to the condition of the Roma in some Italian cities.

One of the Roma delegates from Italy was (because of the meeting) invited to Spain to speak about the situation of the Roma. After that, several EU Member States' officials visited the Roma camp and brought the situation to wider attention.

Awareness of the situation no longer existed only at the local level, but also at a higher policy level. Since this invitation by Spain and the visits, local policy regarding the camps has become much more humane. There was more dialogue with decision-makers and their attitudes changed.

Another positive aspect was the presence of an official of the Italian Ministry of Labour during the eighth European meeting and the fact that the Ministry had been closely monitoring all the national events held in 2009. In 2009, the Ministry of Labour funded a number of national meetings within a specific project entrusted to CILAP EAPN Italy. The respondents think that, through this project, they were able to multiply the meetings.

While some respondents have a strong feeling that the Ministry of Labour, or at least part of it, has become more sensitive to issues of poverty and social inclusion and more attentive to the work of CILAP, others claim that “in Italy in recent years there has been a reduced sensitivity to the problems related to poverty”.

As reported by the Italian respondents to the questionnaire, there has been an increase in communication between people living in poverty and the political class. But this does not mean that there has been an increased use of ‘consultation practices’.

In Poland it is strongly believed that European policies have more influence on national policy, than vice versa. One of the Polish policymakers indicated that the European meetings had a greater impact on the SPC members than on Polish national policy. There are more SPC members present at the meeting, and they transmit this information to the ‘office’.

In the different Member States, different examples of policy influence were mentioned:

United Kingdom

“In UK policy, more emphasis on in-work poverty and debt and in terms of processes, more emphasis on participation of people directly affected.”

Austria

“In Austria the meetings led to funding for a national participation project/process and it raised awareness by public authorities to better include – or at least start consulting – people experiencing poverty”

Finland

“There have been some discussions to lower taxation of low income.”

2.4.3.10. Summary

Besides these examples of the positive impact of the meetings on policies, it needs to be mentioned that several respondents stated that they have not witnessed any positive outcomes of the meetings on policies. This was also clear in the statistics from the quantitative section.

A critique of one Italian policymaker was that policymakers do not need to consult people experiencing poverty because scientists, social workers, trade unions or NGOs already give them all the information they need.

As in the quantitative section, the distance between participants and policymakers at the meetings still appears wide. This was also particularly noticeable for the Norwegian

delegates, because they feel closer to politicians in their home country than those at the meetings.

It remains difficult to influence policies because of elections, in which politicians often display **short-term thinking** and because of which are often only in power for a short time. The administration is usually the permanent partner. It should be borne in mind that policy impact is not always fully visible. Even if the meetings have no direct policy effects, they can have long-term impacts. The results are not always immediately visible, so it may be that the impacts of the meetings on policies will become visible only after a time.

There still exists the danger that the meetings are **used as an excuse for doing nothing** about poverty, that they are just a formality and that outputs of the meetings are not acted upon. On top of that, real participation cannot be reduced to an annual meeting. For example, the Czech government stated that they also wanted to organize a meeting, but the policy of the City of Prague is that they do not want to provide services to homeless people and there is therefore a contradiction. In this regard, it can be problematic that the meetings raise false expectations.

There is a real danger that politicians see the meetings as the outcome of participation, while in reality participation is much more than this. It also involves the preparation and follow-up at national level and it can take place in many different forms (at the micro level and the EU level). Participation needs to be an ongoing process, so participation can never be reduced to simply the meetings.

“The meeting here in Brussels is not the most important event. What is important is the preparation that takes place at national level, and I say this also to organizations like Eurochild who are involved with children’s participation. I do not see participation for the sake of participation. Participation means to have something, you know, needs to lead to something concrete. You have an objective, you want to reach it, so, you involve everybody. And that’s why I think that the.. the most important part of the process is the preparation that takes place at national level. Because also, the situations in the different member-states are different (...) The meetings here in Brussels are the tip of the ice-berg.”

2.4.4. Advice to improve policy impact

2.4.4.4. Institutionalization

The responses to our web survey include the desire for participation to be real, institutionalized and guaranteed.

2.4.4.5. Preparation and support

Financial support for the national participation processes would be useful. To influence politicians, good preparation and support are required. People need to overcome their situations, learn to become spokespersons for a group, work on topics that they find important, etc. To meet this end, the European Commission or the national governments must foresee a budget for the preparation and follow-up and should provide more support

for the National Networks. This would stimulate policymakers to consult people experiencing poverty when drafting reports about social exclusion

For example, the Belgian network had a strong delegation with strong dossiers. This was partly because of the means and support they got (because of the federal plan for poverty reduction in Belgium), meaning that they could employ staff, coordinators, interpreters, etc. The good quality of their input is guaranteed by the work that has been done for years by the regional networks. The topics discussed are explored in the past and the people experiencing poverty are already involved for a long time.

2.4.4.6. Follow-up and planning

In terms of follow-up, it is important that the meetings do not simply make some proposals. Follow-up should ensure that politicians feel the pressure to actually care about the proposals and prepare effective policy measures to deal with them.

There is a need for more strategic planning. For example, the meetings could be organized just before the European Summit, which would establish a clear link, ensure visibility and attract media attention. In 2010, the meetings took place the weekend after this event, which was not the best option strategically. On the other hand, the ninth meeting was planned the weekend after the Summit because they wanted to involve more Members of the European Parliament. During the week of the European Summit these MPs were in Strasbourg, while the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty have the tradition and experience of being organized in Brussels. A more strategic timing of the meetings could be to link them to the European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion. It would also be strategic to ensure that the meetings are held every year, so that a certain regularity is ensured.

2.4.4.7. Politicians

More members of the SPC should be present. In some years many have been, but in other years there have been fewer members present. A greater diversity of policymakers must be present. Not only those who have already been convinced need to be present, such as those responsible for social affairs and poverty-reduction policies, but the policymakers and ministers responsible for economic affairs, finance, etc. also need to be there. People from other DGs (directorates general) in the Commission, for example finance or agriculture, also need to be invited. On the other hand, it remains important that there are not too many politicians, otherwise they may crowd out people experiencing poverty from the meeting floor. The impact would also be increased if the politicians did not only speak and leave the meetings, but if they really participated and engaged in direct dialogue in the workshops. This is not easy for the politicians, because people experiencing poverty are very critical.

The policy impact could be enhanced if the meetings were to be more focused on heads of state and government, higher-level politicians and also on national governments.

Not only do more politicians need to be present, but also their administrations. In many cases these are equally important, and certainly more continuous.

Among many other countries, Poland had no national politicians present at the meetings. The Polish people experiencing poverty reported that this hindered their participation and the impact of the meetings on national policies. An interview with a

Polish politician indicates that there a number of reasons why politicians were not present.

First of all, the Polish politicians are not convinced of the meetings' importance. The European meetings may have become an influential instrument, but they are not so influential that a Polish minister would participate. Knowledge about participation has not yet penetrated through to Polish policymakers and many of them consider participation in the meetings as somewhat revolutionary. Polish policymaking has no tradition of direct participation by people experiencing poverty, and is very bureaucratic. Several politicians are afraid of starting the procedure of participating in the meetings, because they are afraid of the consequences this may have within the administration and the ministry, and on policy.

There also used to be problems with invitations that were sent too late to the SPC, so that it was almost impossible for the SPC members to plan the meetings in their agendas.

2.4.4.8. Media attention

Media attention can also enhance the impact of the meetings. For example, in *Belgium* the meeting never made the public broadcasting news broadcasts. In other countries, this was sometimes the case. It is partly the responsibility of the National Networks to gain media attention in their own countries, but EAPN could advise on strategies to get more media attention.

The European Commission is obviously very interested in having more media attention on the meetings. One of the respondents, however, had doubts about the reason of this media interest. The respondent thought that politicians were only interested in media attention as a means of promoting themselves. The person was afraid that journalists would reduce the voices of the people experiencing poverty to some marginal, sensationalist quotes and sad stories. Journalists are very welcome at the meeting. The problem is not that there is no attention on poverty. The issue is about the way in which poverty is presented.

Because of the support of the Commission, more journalists have been present and the message of the meetings was carried further. To have a larger impact on policy, it is appropriate to have more media attention, not necessarily only through traditional media, but also by using new media.

The Norwegian media and press are allies in terms of putting poverty-related issues on the agenda. They are a great help for the lobbying work of NGOs and publicize stories on people experiencing poverty. The media are considered an important partner. The relations between the Norwegian media and poverty NGOs can be an example for other countries. It shows that the 'laws of the media' are reconcilable with the goals of people experiencing poverty and NGOs.

The Polish NGOs and the delegation of people experiencing poverty, as well as politicians, mentioned that the meetings and poverty topics more broadly do not attract enough media attention in Poland. All of them said that more media attention would ensure a bigger impact of the meetings on public opinion, the engagement of politicians and European and national policies. The media were seen as one of the biggest tools with which to fight poverty. Nevertheless, the Polish media is largely sensationalist, with little interest in poverty, social policies or Europe.

2.4.4.9. Visibility

The larger the audience that is reached, the greater the impact on policies. To raise public awareness about the meetings, the meetings themselves need to be promoted. When people are aware of the meetings, they will feel more quickly connected to topics of the meetings.

It must also be made clear, though, that more visibility means higher expectations. The importance of the follow-up process would also grow. The more institutionalized and political the meetings become, the greater the importance of the direct reaction of politicians rises. The Commission could maybe produce a recommendation or a communication tool, brought together with a view to implementation.

2.4.4.10. Specific advice

The meetings need to be more concrete. Otherwise, there is the danger that they represent words without actions. Some people complain because they had the impression that they were always supposed to talk about their personal experiences, while they themselves were more interested in more political participation, policy recommendations and learning how to change policies. One respondent said that it would be better to have smaller groups discussing specific topics. People experiencing poverty often come to these meetings with relatively little information about what is currently going on at European level.

“The recommendations are not translated into action because they are often too general. Most of the progress is being made on increasing participation of people experiencing poverty but not on the content/core of policy making. There is a danger that the focus may entirely be on the process and that the actual impact on policy development becomes an issue of secondary importance.”

“The chairmanship arranging the meeting could be more specific in their introduction. Choose a few points which will be the ‘headlines’ for this meeting. For instance: If next meeting will be about EY2010, one could choose just a few important elements from the Year.”

One of the experts gave an example of how the meetings could be better and more concrete:

“In Denmark, they developed a national homelessness strategy and they were discussing two different approaches that this homelessness strategy could take. One was called housing first, and the other was a staircase-model, and they had a big meeting, with homeless people in Denmark, and they explained, you know, in simple words the kinds of these two concepts, and said: what do you think, what would you prefer? And they also told them that the Danish government had already made up their mind. That they are going for the housing first model. So they gave people all the information necessary, they explained to them this goal of their intervention, they said, you know, you are not going to change the government decision, however, you know, by your contribution could help them to prevent some negative side effects that they would not have thought, to prevent these things. So, it was on a national policy; But it was broken down into concrete questions where then people who had experienced homelessness in Denmark could link to the bigger picture etc, but they

could... it does concretely say, for my experience, this is interesting for policymakers, because it's really very concrete (...)"

More targets and concrete objectives of the meetings should be highlighted. These targets and objectives need to be monitored and evaluated.

"The report of each European meeting is discussed at the Council, but we do not get clear answers on our recommendations and proposals. They must give examples of how they have listened and what they have done with our advice."

2.4.4.11. Reports

The reports need to be more widely distributed and better used. Currently, the reports are only sent to the participants. The link between the meetings and the actual policies must become clearer. The reports need to be used much more to emphasize the difference between recommendations and current policies. There is a need for publications and strong reports from the meetings, which politicians and organizations can work with.

It would also be advantageous if the reports of the European meetings would be not only translated, but also published in different languages. These reports should also include a page devoted to the situation in each country. This way the reports would be useful at the national level and could be used as a great educational resource in schools.

2.4.4.12. Informal moments

Some of the responses to the web survey highlighted the fact that policy influence happens largely during the informal moments at the meetings. During these informal moments, there are fruitful contacts between national delegations and politicians. To make this policy influence and lobbying even more effective, it is necessary to dedicate more time and attention to the informal moments.

2.4.4.13. Multidimensional policies

There is a need for multidimensional policies, also about participation. The meeting must be embedded in other policy work and the other activities of EAPN. At the same time, participation in several other EU events and domains needs to be made possible. The meetings should remain on the agenda of other European and national occasions, and EU and national policies (e.g. on participation) need to be more coordinated.

"To develop participation of people experiencing poverty and of any EU citizens in EU Policies affecting their lives. Not only in social policies, but also in economic, rural, transport, health... policies."

"The main challenge is for the meeting to remain an important reality check space and to take up more of its results into other spaces such as the social policy round table by the autumn presidencies."

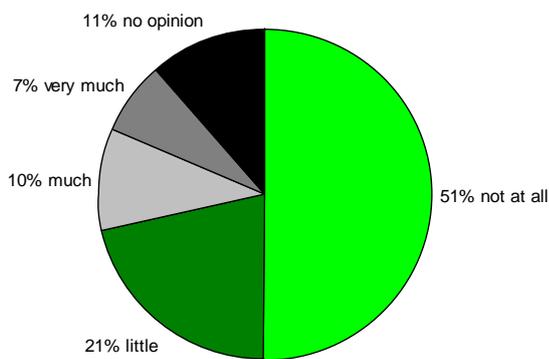
2.5. Participation at the meetings

2.5.1. Percentages of all respondents

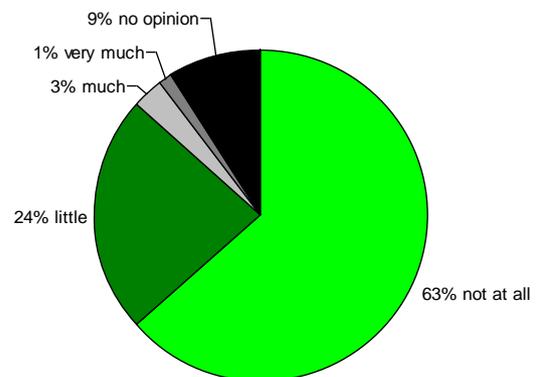
Participation in the meetings is an overall success. Approximately 87% of respondents had no problems with language. Around 84% were motivated to participate and 83% did not find the work pressure too high. Approximately 80% of the participants found they could intervene in the debate and 78% considered themselves sufficiently informed.

Approximately 72% of the respondents indicated they had no problems with the preparation, and only 17% did experience problems in this regard. The weakness in terms of participation is that approximately 26% of the respondents had expectations that were too high.

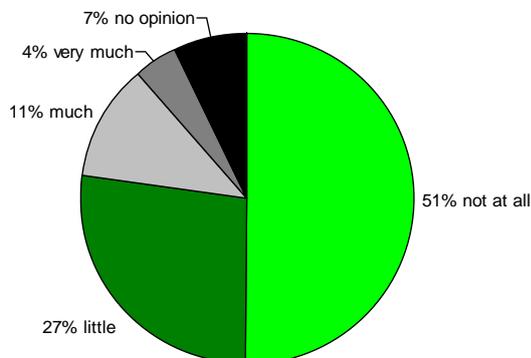
The preparation was too short



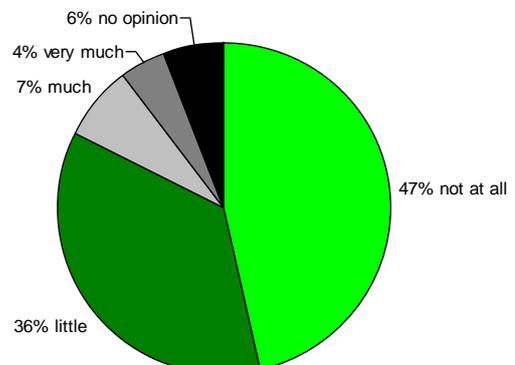
The spoken language was too difficult



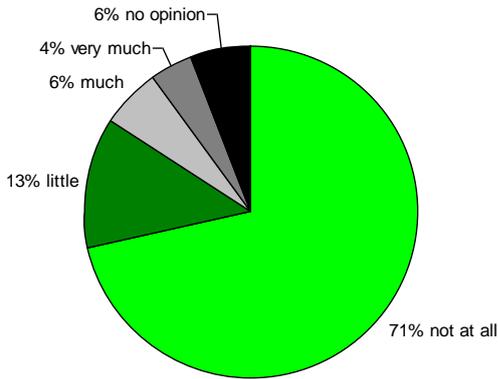
Not enough information was given about the meeting



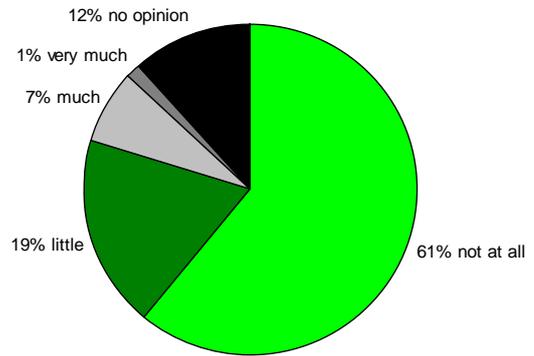
The work pressure at the meeting was too high



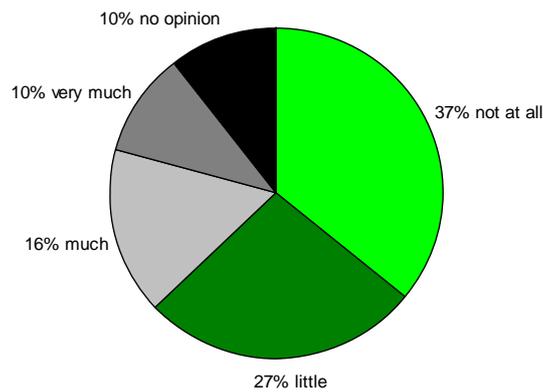
I was not motivated to participate



I did not get the right to intervene in the debate



There was a gap between my expectations and the results of the meeting



2.5.2. Percentages by category of respondent

Approximately 93% of the **policymakers** indicated they had some problems with participation.

The **people experiencing poverty** had little or no problems participating. Approximately 92% were motivated enough, around 88% thought they were informed enough, 83% did not have any problems with the work pressure, 83% had no problems intervening in the debate and 82% experienced no language problems. It is, however, remarkable that 48% of the people experiencing poverty indicated they had no problems with too high expectations, while 48% did have too high expectations.

The **NGO representatives** seemed to have more problems, mainly with too little information (approximately 21% of the respondents from NGOs) and too high expectations (22%). They did not have problems with language (78% did not have problems), motivation (79%), work

pressure (75%) or the possibility of intervening (75%). 62% of the NGO respondents declared themselves as having no problems with the preparation.

The organizing team also seems to have had too high expectations about the meetings. Approximately 50% indicated that their expectations were too high. Language and information were not a problem for anyone in the organizing team. Approximately 71% were satisfied with the preparation (29% did not respond). One person from the organizing team had a problem with work pressure and one person was not motivated enough to participate.

Summary per category

	Policy makers	NGOs	People Experiencing Poverty	Organizing team
No participation problems	93%	75%	92 %	86 %
Too high expectations	14 %	22%	48%	50%
Satisfied with preparation	86 %	62%	71 %	71%

2.5.3. Information beyond the statistics

The figures give a good picture of the evaluation of the participation at the meetings. Our interviewees were also utterly satisfied about participation at the meetings.

“I think that the meeting was successful by the participation of people, the wishes were articulated, problems also, which are very important for every country.”

“I was able to declare that I was a Roma, which is sometimes very hard, because you do not know how people will react.”

Despite this satisfaction, many respondents gave advice in terms of further enhancing participation at the meetings. Many respondents to the web survey only participated once. They were ‘new’ participants. As a consequence, they probably gained less in terms of personal development and had more problems with participation than more regular attendees.

We also need to mention that participation should not be understood as narrowly restricted to the European meetings themselves. Participation has a broader scope. Participation requires more inclusion in society and more involvement in several policy domains, in the EU and individual countries. One of the purposes of the meetings is to **enhance the participation in NGOs**, so that people experiencing poverty become more active in their networks and in NGOs themselves.

“Well I think participation is not just participation for the sake of participation. Participation is about an end... and the end is about trying to achieve some sort of

progress. And so for me that is participation is at... and the question is... does this meeting contribute to trying, trying in this hard struggle to get more social progress”

“The European meetings should be part of a process that runs throughout the year on the national level – a process that would engage the most vulnerable and empower them not only for their participation at meetings but for participation in society in general.”

“You could never and should never orientate your participation around that process, because participation means much more than that, and it can take place in many different fora, both, as we know it, at micro-level and the EU-level and it should never be reduced to this.”

It is good that many of the politicians and civil society organizations present are **already convinced** of the value of participation, because otherwise it would be very difficult for the people experiencing poverty to participate and tell personal stories and also convince politicians. Some people experiencing poverty leave their villages for the first time, and so it is difficult to expect that they themselves can convince politicians and NGOs about the merits of participation. The politicians need to be open and be prepared to listen. They do not need to argue and defend themselves. When the people experiencing poverty feel intimidated, their arguments are obscured. They participate less and become quiet.

The informal moments are very important in terms of stimulating participation. The ‘market place’ is also seen as a good practice. At these informal moments, other topics (that were not mentioned during the official moments) can be discussed. Nevertheless, more time for the informal moments, as well as a greater supply of interpreters, is desirable.

“I like the market place approach which allowed a more informal exchange between people experiencing poverty from different countries to talk to other stakeholders.”

Participation can certainly be enhanced, but it is necessary to take into account what possibilities are realistic to expect. There are, for example, more than 22 languages used at the meetings, and with different types of people, different levels and different experiences and discussions, this is hard to manage.

2.5.3.1. Preparation

The meetings are stressful and far-reaching. People experiencing poverty need to have the courage and preparation to participate and speak in front of such a big audience. For this there is need for structural, **(thematically) national preparation**.

The meetings evolved and now have a better preparation process than before. As a consequence, people have become better prepared and it has become easier from them to make an input. Because of this better preparation, the message of the meetings has become more political and less personal. The people experiencing poverty speak with knowledge and expertise. Participation can start immediately from a higher level. Currently, however, while the preparations have improved, they often remain ad hoc. They should be a year-long process. EAPN can provide guidance on a good preparation process.

“I think in the beginning it was more consultation, we are now, we are now improving... from a year to another one, and also through the continuous work, done at the national level, in the National Networks to increase participation in EAPN, at all

the levels we are increasing the process, and we are approaching ... what I should call the good participation, yeah yeah. One, I will, I will give you an example. Last year there was really a strong demand towards the Commission to say: okay that's fine... we are coming here since years, now we need to receive (...) from you, an evaluation of what you have done... with our request and demands."

The personal circumstances of participants require them to be granted some form of support. For this reason, it is very important that the participants are **a member of a group**, which provides them with preparation and support. But there is also the need for a standardized form of preparation, so that the differences between the preparations undertaken in each country become smaller. People should be well prepared, otherwise they feel frustrated and not listened to. The Polish delegation remarked that delegations that are better prepared dominate the dialogue at the meetings:

"That what makes participation work at the meetings is that there has been a preparation process which is time beforehand."

"Some people were very well prepared, knew what to expect, were very capable, you know, and other people just are not. I think it's crucial. But the difficulty with these kinds of meetings is that it is never possible to make sure that everyone has the same level of preparation, because it relied upon the sort of National Networks to deal with that."

The preparation can be improved via education and further training of the national coordinators.

It is necessary that participants know what is possible and realistic to expect from participation and from policymakers. As previously revealed from the results of the questionnaire, the expectations of many of the participants were too high. This can have a negative impact on participation. This emphasizes the importance of the preparation process, where people which needs to focus on what people can expect from the whole process. The people experiencing poverty need to have more awareness and knowledge of the European level. For example, many of the participants have the false idea of an hierarchic European level. They hope Europe will force their government to do the things that they mention at the meetings. The EU, however, does not have many opportunities or the means to do that.

"That your participation is important but it's not going to dramatically change. Neither in your life or in policies, because it can be very frustrating, if you think well, we came here and said this and nothing happened. So people sort of... it's not that nothing should happen, cause it's a... people just need to be helped to be realistic about their contributing to a change."

There is also **a need for national support** for the preparation and participation processes. It is not only the responsibility of the organizing team to be well-prepared; national governments also have their responsibilities. It is recommended that they finance the preparations, so that people experiencing poverty can be supported in their preparation and participation.

"Providing adequate funds for the most excluded people to be prepared on the national level before participating at the actual event in Brussels and while in Brussels"

to be given the chance to really express themselves by addressing policymakers and politicians and engaging in a real dialogue with them.”

Some of the Italian respondents expressed the need to receive the preparatory materials well in advance so they can have enough time to study them. The preparatory process in general is designated as important. When participants are well-prepared, they can engage better with participants from other countries. But participants need to have the means for undergoing good preparation.

“Do not hold national meetings and then not knowing what to say. In such a case I would speak on my behalf only and not on behalf of a group of many people who followed us during the national meetings. I know it is difficult to organize such meetings because money is short. The project of the Ministry of 2009 has helped us a great deal. There should be more projects like this.”

There is also a need to have more discipline. Some delegations took the floor without asking and they hindered the participation of the other delegations. This need for discipline can be stressed during the preparations.

2.5.3.2. Workshops

People need to feel comfortable, because it is difficult to speak to a bigger audience. In a smaller group, it is easier to speak. The presentations during the workshops should not last too long. There needs to be more time for the workshops and the workshops themselves need to be smaller. This would make it less frightening for participants to speak.

“Too many different associations/participants in a group could limit the sense of freedom that organizations/persons will need to promote their opinions.”

During the workshops, the delegations are divided into groups. But the delegations want to hear all the other groups, because they want to have information about all the other countries. It would be advantageous if the composition of the workshops changed with every new topic, so that the delegations could come into contact with those from more countries.

The Norwegian delegation said that it is better to focus only on concrete topics during the meetings and workshops. They asked themselves: What do we want to accomplish? All the national delegations can put pressure on their governments about this topic. The year after, the representatives, politicians, people experiencing poverty and NGOs could come back and say what they had done about this topic. Politicians need to unveil what has happened after the former meeting (and what is done with the advice of the European meetings). Even if nothing was done, this needs to be mentioned. In this way, the impact can be evaluated and improved.

It is also important that at the workshops and meetings, discussion is not limited to problems and bad situations. Solutions need to be discussed and positive impacts need to be mentioned.

After the workshops, at the plenary section, some spokesmen were required to explain the conclusions of their workshop group. Some of these spokesmen (representatives) did not portray the vision and conclusions of their groups, but rather only their own views. In the future, this needs to be double-checked.

The venue of the workshops needs to be clearly explained at the meetings. People easily got lost in a strange city or building.

2.5.3.3. Time

Almost one quarter of the respondents mentioned **a lack of time** (mostly during the workshops, the informal moments and during the discussions with policymakers). Some of the Polish delegates wanted the meetings to be longer, so that they could first meet the other participants and only then start the actual participation.

One of the respondents suggested that the meetings should have a duration of two full days instead of two half days, while others think that even two full days would be too short. Because of these problems with time, the meetings are too intense, which leads to more work pressure.

Making informal contacts with all of the politicians present and speaking with different decision-makers take up lots of time.

The time pressure during the preparation is also very high. To ameliorate this, the reports and preparatory information need to be sent further in advance and the topics of the meetings need to be known earlier. Only in this way can the people experiencing poverty process the material at their own pace.

ATD Fourth World of Poland suggests having the meetings only every two years. By doing so, there would be one year for the preparation and one year for the follow-up. This would relieve the time pressure. Currently, the preparation for the next meetings must already start immediately after the meetings, so there is not enough time to give feedback.

2.5.3.4. Politicians

A balance between the participants, politicians, and other participants needs to be realized. Everybody's message needs to be heard. The workshop chairmen and reporters are in a good position to manage this process and provide great help. These workshop facilitators have the important task of leading the workshops and the participation process. They need to manage the different expectations of the participants, their different capacities, the proposed subjects and discussions and their personal stories. But they also need to communicate to the policymakers what the people experiencing poverty have said. Translating individual stories into policy advice is their strength.

"Like for me for example when I was president of workshop like that for the priority was making sure that the people who were in the workshop felt that they had been able to say what they wanted to say, and listened-to, and that they understood the other people in the workshop, but then, we were supposed to have probably policy outcomes and so you had to see where you were going to put the emphasis, strange sentence: because of the time it was hard to choose what we were supposed to be discussing in terms of outcomes."

It is important that politicians and people experiencing poverty do not talk in a parallel way but engage in real dialogue with each other. There needs to be more direct participation,

direct dialogue, political will, communication and interest on the part of the politicians. The dialogue with the policymakers must be quieter and less hurried. The people experiencing poverty must be considered 'citizens' by the politicians and NGOs and they need to be treated with the same dignity as would other citizens

"I particularly liked the year when the meeting was held in the EESC, when the workshops prepared questions to put to the decision-makers – I thought this led to a much more targeted debate, and putting decision-makers more on the spot, rather than making rather general speeches."

The Norwegian people experiencing poverty consider the speeches long and full of empty promises. Speeches should not be written in advance, but rather need to pick up on what the people experiencing poverty have said at the meetings. The Lithuanian delegation thought the politicians' speeches were a good experience, but also that they were technical and that it was difficult to sustain attention. The policymakers need to engage in more real participation.

The Belgian delegation had a further opinion about the speeches. Initially, they considered the speeches long and dull. Over the years, however this formal part of the meetings has become less dull. The meetings have constantly improved. There needs to be more preparation time, more qualitative input, more politicians taking part in the workshops, etc. There are already fewer formal moments, more participation and more opportunities for the people experiencing poverty to speak.

It should also be clarified that the speeches are a part of the processes of lobbying, policymaking, agenda setting, keeping poverty under the attention of politicians, and of exchange with politicians. One may have the impression that speeches are written before the meeting and are not much inspired by the results of the meetings.

2.5.3.5. Mix between political participation and individual stories

People who are more interested in more political participation and policy recommendations were frustrated because they had the impression that they were only supposed to talk about their personal experiences. They wanted more concrete and specific issues to be spoken about. It would be better to have only one or two subjects to discuss. This would provide the possibility of going into more depth regarding these subjects. It would also be good to have more NGOs that are specialized in certain poverty subjects present.

Other respondents wanted more time and space to talk about their personal experiences and to get to know each other in a more personal, informal way. There needs to be a balanced mix of political participation and individual stories.

2.5.3.6. Topics

It would also be better if the people experiencing poverty had more input into the agenda and the topics that are chosen. At this moment, the topics are chosen by the EU Presidency, the European Commission and EAPN. Sometimes they are well chosen, but sometimes they are not. There is a danger that the agenda and the meetings are influenced too greatly by professionals and institutions. Because the meetings have become more and more politicized, it is necessary to prevent them from becoming a top-down process. While they

should not simply become a charity process, they do need to be bottom-up. The topics must at least be critically reflected upon.

“It has this weird status that on the one hand it’s presented as the people experiencing poverty from Europe inviting policymakers to talk about poverty, but in fact the agenda is driven by the different presidency agendas. So they kind of put forward the issues, they are interested in. So it’s weird relationship because on the one hand, it’s supposed to be a very bottom-up approach, but in fact, it’s very much top-down.”

“The homeless people, they will be requested to say something about ... I do not know, issues that are maybe less relevant to them, and on which they are not necessarily experts, because homeless people are experts on the experience of homelessness and there should be the opportunity for them to say something specific about that.”

“Without these meetings I feel the top would lose sight of what happens at the bottom so to speak.”

Because of the economic and financial crisis, the topics in 2010 were mostly crisis-related. Because of this, there was less or little attention given to important topics such as health. It is important that not only the crisis is discussed, but also the human consequences of the crisis for people experiencing poverty.

2.5.3.7. *Environment*

For people experiencing poverty, it is difficult coming to strange places for the first time. Sometimes it was hard for them to participate because of the overwhelming atmosphere of the meetings. Because of the frightening new environment, one of the respondents was afraid to leave the hotel. This is why it is better for people to participate several times. One respondent was very active in participating at a local level, but at a European level he did not know how to act and to prepare. It was therefore very helpful for him to learn to participate at a higher level.

The meetings take place in a formal environment and the expectations and pressures from outside are high. Many people experiencing poverty are ashamed of their situations, certainly when politicians blame them for being responsible. Offensive remarks by politicians or civil society actors need to be avoided.

“More time. A less frightening formal and institutional environment. More empowering. Not giving people the feeling that they are being studied as in a zoo. Creating a space of trust. A different attitude on behalf of policy-makers who participate – not patronizing, stiff and formal like at an EU event, but an open friendly attitude of just interacting with people, on a level of equality, and finding out what they need.”

“The feeling of shame amongst participants. Worse, the feeling of being blamed for their situation. Stigma and mistrust. A frightening, new institutional environment and a stiff approach on behalf of decision-makers.”

Some of the *Polish* respondents said that the environment was intimidating and they did not like the luxury of the hotels, because of the contrast with their home situation and because of the costs involved. One of them suggested using the money paid to the hotel for real and effective poverty reduction instead.

But for most of the people experiencing poverty, the environment is not an insurmountable problem. Preparation, support, and the removal of barriers by the organizers ensure that participation became easier and the new environment does not become a problem.

The *Belgian delegation* complained, however, that the luxury environment created a false image of Belgium, giving the impression that there was no poverty in the country. This image needs to be corrected.

The people experiencing poverty must be supported so that they feel at ease. They must be treated respectfully. ATD Fourth World highlighted the need for a friendly environment, where people can have activities together, share human experiences and have friendly, informal contacts.

The participants also need to be accompanied to go back to their own situations of poverty. They need psychological support, because some of them are going literally back to the streets.

2.5.3.8. *Language*

Language can be a problem during the meetings' informal moments. During the receptions, coffee breaks, the lunch and the diner, attempts are made to make contacts but there are language problems. This is partly the responsibility of the national coordinators, because they accompany the delegations, but it is impossible for them to translate for all the informal contacts. Translation also involves interpretation, and many concepts are not clear for the people experiencing poverty, so the national coordinators need to explain these concepts. The language and communication issues were also tiresome for people experiencing poverty and for national coordinators.

According to the Italian respondents, not knowing English prevents direct exchange during 'free' times, such as coffee breaks or lunch. But this factor did not prevent participation because "the poor have the ability to use the same language in all latitudes". The meetings encouraged several Polish delegates to learn English. The possibility of learning English needs to be included in the preparation or at the meetings. In this regard, some respondents suggested introducing language laboratories.

There is not only a problem with language translation, but also with the language used by the politicians present and by the organizers. Their language is politicized and hard to understand for people experiencing poverty. They want simpler, less political and more emotional language. Politicians often use their own policy language, with their own vocabularies. They often create the impression that they want to mislead the people experiencing poverty. By this, they often make matters worse, and do not become closer to the people experiencing poverty.

It also needs to be made clear that policymakers need to engage in direct dialogue with people experiencing poverty. Often the meetings remain limited to an exchange of experiences between the people experiencing poverty.

The use of policy jargon ensures that people learn more policy words, but on the other hand, it hinders intelligibility and participation. A balance between participation and personal development should be found.

The Italian delegation could speak only Italian, which meant they could not split up across different workshops. Because they remained together in a single group, they could not spread their knowledge across the workshops and share it with the delegations of other countries. More translation services should be provided, so that people meet and engage with more delegations.

“You know sometimes for people experiencing poverty it is a completely new situation to talk from their experience and to talk into the arena of policy making. So it’s a kind of obstacle too. They have to come over... to be public about their problems and so.”

There is also non-verbal communication at the meetings, such as participants’ posters and photos. Some of the people do not mind speaking in front of big groups, but others need to express themselves in smaller groups or more visually. The Italian delegation thinks that the current creative elements are too formal, long and dull. They want to have more communication games or theatre.

The Norwegian delegates could speak English, but delegates from other countries could not. The use of abbreviation is extensive and some information gets lost.

The translation available by headphones is a big help. Nevertheless, people experiencing poverty need to pay attention to the translation, because at times mistakes could appear in the translations, retranslations and summaries. This is very tiresome for the participants (certainly after a tiring journey to the European meetings in Brussels).

2.5.3.9. *Indirect costs*

Taking part in the meetings is often difficult to combine with a job. Other specific problems of the daily life of people experiencing poverty (for example having no money for childcare) also cause stress, which hinders participation in the meetings. The organizers must provide child care, make arrangements with employers, grant time to prepare, etc. All these indirect costs need to be taken into account.

To make participation possible, people need to be familial, and socially and financially at ease. Without that, it is difficult or impossible for them to participate. So, improving the situation of people experiencing poverty goes hand-in-hand with improving the participation of people experiencing poverty. One cannot have one without the other.

An important problem that was mentioned by the Lithuanian respondents was that the airline tickets and travel costs were only repaid after the meeting. Because of this, the people experiencing poverty needed to have in advance a large amount of money, and in several cases borrow this from family, the community or even from banks. As a result of this practical problem they were worried and less at ease at the meetings

It would be advantageous for the participation process, though not necessarily realistic, if people had an adequate minimum income, providing people a certain security. When people experiencing poverty are confronted with a new problem, most of the time all of their attention goes to this problem and not to the participation process.

2.5.3.10. *Different expertise*

The differences and specific expertise of people (such as homelessness, people with disabilities, drug abuse, etc.) must be taken into account more thoroughly. These people all have specific information that could lead to the development of specific and concrete policy recommendations. Also, children should be involved in the meetings, because their experiences are different and specific.

“Eurochild promotes children's participation. We asked that children be included in the meetings of people experiencing poverty. This has not been possible to date. There has been little/no attempt to gather the views and experiences of children.”

There is a certain time pressure, certainly during the workshops where there were many languages and nationalities, and it is more difficult for people to understand and respect each other because of cultural differences and particular contexts. In (former Soviet) eastern European countries, it is also harder to achieve participation, because there is a cultural suspicion against uniting and participating. So the delegations need to learn to sense each other.

2.5.3.11. *New and old participants*

There is a need for new participants, so that new issues can be raised and older issues can be discussed in new ways. The presence of new participants also means more work for the organizers and a more difficult participation process, because they need to start over from the beginning. However, this would mean that more people experiencing poverty would be empowered, the National Networks would become stronger and support become bigger. On the other hand, when the same delegates come every year, they got more empowered and experienced. People who come for the first time are often nervous about speaking; other people who have attended several times are more capable of participating.

For the delegates who participated several times, it is necessary to ensure that the meetings are not always the same, and that there are not too many repetitions.

For the national delegations, it is better for the participation when they have a mix of ‘new’ delegates and ‘old’ delegates who were already present at a former meeting.

2.5.3.12. *Most marginalized*

People experiencing poverty who are less confident in speaking must be challenged to speak in public and given the floor. It would be bad for participation if only the most vocal were to speak. The most marginalized people are often not present at the meetings.

Quiet people are not invited to the meetings and are almost never heard. One does not see their visions and problems at the meetings. The most ideal people, who have the biggest need for participation, are often forgotten. Some delegates also take the floor more often than others. It is necessary for all participants to have equal opportunity to speak and express their opinions.

2.5.3.13. *People with disabilities*

One of the Italian respondents noted that the organizers must overcome some limitations with regard to accommodating people with disabilities. Indeed, “if the meeting places were always easily accessible, this was not so for some of the restaurants”. There was a man in a wheelchair who could not go up the stairs or use the elevator. Furthermore, the tables in the restaurant were too high for wheelchair users.

2.5.3.14. *Follow-up*

There is a need for follow-up. People need to know what has been done with their inputs. Conclusions must be outlined and the Commission must say what they are doing about poverty, for example with the structural funds, even if this does involve the use of ‘EU jargon’. It is better to hear something, rather than nothing. Another form of impact could be to strengthen NGOs.

“There must be answers to our requests. Otherwise, people are likely to get tired of coming to these meetings.”

More than a quarter of the respondents mentioned explicitly (in the open questions) that there is more need for follow-up and feedback from the organizers as well as from policymakers. Many respondents want to know what happened with their policy advice and what the policymakers have done about poverty. They also want to know how the people experiencing poverty experience new poverty laws.

“Having feedback of the impact of the meetings on national governments and the EU is crucial as it does give participation a ‘purpose’ and a positive outcome.”

“More structured feedback to people experiencing poverty about how their suggestions and priorities have had an impact on EU policies and practices. At the moment it is not clear how much influence these events have in practice.”

Positive outcomes of the meetings need to be mentioned at the next European meeting. A lack of visible progress hinders the participation of people experiencing poverty, because they became disappointed.

“Personal outcomes for delegates are important but the lack of progress, particularly at local level, is a serious issue.”

At the same time, they want honest feedback from motivated politicians, and not empty slogans, hollow promises and false hope. Too high or unrealistic expectations hinder participation. The results of the quantitative web survey show that the meetings cannot match expectations that are too high.

“False expectations – at the meetings the delegates get a sense that something is finally being done, but that is not the case. It is very much up to the NGOs and delegates to keep pushing and keep the issues on the agenda for change.”

It is also important, when information is sent to the National Networks, that this information is not only in English. Most of the networks do not have the time and money to translate these documents for their members. For the follow-up to reach the national level, the documents need to be provided in the native language.

“They complain that they did not know between two meetings what's happening. They come to the meetings they speak to them and then there is nothing happening like in one year, and I have also the feeling that it's mainly the persons from the organization, who are attending the meeting, who are informed. But the information does not go enough beyond the meeting, and beyond these people.”

2.5.3.15. Self correction

To understand people experiencing poverty, one needs to be confronted with those people regularly and for an extended period of time. In order to achieve this, the meetings need to involve a long and structured process.

The meetings are constantly improving their participation processes, and this has also provided an example for several national participation processes.

“Norway used the example of the policy and participation from EU on the cooperation with people experiencing poverty. EU (EAPN) has been an inspiration in the creation of a liaison group with the Government and the people experiencing poverty administered by the Minister of Labour, and also inviting other ministries such as the Minister responsible for housing.”

“In our internal analysis at EAPN we learn of more and more similar national processes happening and a tendency to institutionalise these national processes and to give them a certain weight in national policy making. Networks are less afraid to work with participation because of the experience at the EU meetings and there are strong dimensions of participative project and policy work.”

“They are discussing a lot of things... and also because of, in the process of this meeting in (...) itself there is a work done... now since two or three years, to increase participation to people. I am speaking about, this weekend we had just a participation meeting, with people coming from all Europe, people experiencing poverty. Discussing about strategic, good practice, good means and all... yes, it is increasing a lot. I think the meetings also, also allows, allow to... EAPN... to push participation in EAPN itself... to increase it, to develop, to have a reflection about it, to exchange different experiences.”

3. Conclusions

This study on the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty, wanted to answer four research questions:

1. **Did the meetings have an impact on people experiencing poverty?**
2. **Did the meetings have an impact on civil society organizations and institutions?**
3. **Did the meetings have an impact on European or national policies and policymakers?**
4. **How can participation at the meetings be enhanced?**

The information gathered during this research is very rich. The answers to the questions contain different perspectives and highlighted nuances, which may be linked to the variety of local contexts or to different experiences with participation of people experiencing poverty. This concluding chapter provides an overview of the research results.

3.1. Impact on people experiencing poverty

We will start by answering the first question: ‘Did the meetings have an impact on people experiencing poverty?’ The figures show us that the meetings had a significant impact on participants. Six important factors that influenced the (empowerment of) people experiencing poverty were distinguished:

1. The first element is **emotional and psychological support**. People experiencing poverty mentioned several emotional and psychological effects of the meetings. They felt more confident, self-conscious, proud, mature, professional, erudite, emotionally relieved, and recognized. They gained more confidence in politicians, more self-esteem and more self-respect. They felt more optimistic and less stigmatised, lonely, experienced less self-pity, and focused less on themselves and felt less subordinated as a result of the meeting.
2. They also developed **collective feelings**. They experienced a sense of solidarity and a cross-national, European identity was developed. They also wanted to help each other and felt more at ease and included.
3. These social feelings had an impact on the **social capital** of people. Contacts, friendships, personal relations, internet relations, partnerships and networks were formed.
4. People experiencing poverty gained not only social capital, but also **cultural capital**.

They obtained **new knowledge**. This included new information about participation, about policies, about policymaking and influencing policies, about legislation in other countries, about the European level, about other people’s realities, about diversity in situations and in poverty issues, about the experiences and solutions of other people experiencing poverty, about new problems, about social rights, about seeing problems in a broader perspective, participation methods, and viewing politicians more positively and as more engaged. People experiencing poverty learned to see poverty as a societal

problem and they became more realistic about the means and timing of developing policy measures and solutions.

They also developed **new skills**. They gained in terms of development in general, the ability to handle difficult situations, learned to engage in dialogue, gained the expertise of how to deal with poverty, self-help, on how to speak in public to large groups, how to listen to others and how to represent others.

And they had **new experiences**: people travelled and left their country, were confronted with the 'unique' setting of the meetings, and escaped from their situations of poverty for a couple of days.

5. Because of the emotional and psychological advances, development of collective feelings, social capital, skills, knowledge and experiences, the people experiencing poverty **became more involved**. They became more active and engaged in policy discussions and engaged in other events and meetings. Some of them now feel like ambassadors of their networks, countries and/or communities. They have become active at the national or European level and have started sharing information with others (e.g. their community, network, etc.).
6. People experiencing poverty expect that they really can **escape out of their situations**. They want to see their material conditions improved and to improve their economic capital. The meetings made this possible for a few participants. Some of them found work, moved to better housing conditions, started a project, or became active or employed in an NGO and are now using their expertise to help others.

Besides these six main impacts, some additional remarks can be made. Firstly, the impact of the meetings on people experiencing poverty is not always positive. The respondents also mentioned some negative impacts such as the minimalization of their own situations, frustrations, feelings of powerlessness, etc. Despite this, the general picture indicates that the impact on people experiencing poverty is the most important of all impacts.

Secondly, we want to highlight the importance of the preparation process. The respondents said that their preparation process was a crucial determinant of the impact of the meetings on people experiencing poverty. If the national delegations of people experiencing poverty are well prepared, they are better able to contribute to the discussions effectively and to participate at their best.

It is also clear that the impact on people experiencing poverty had an effect on civil society actors and their impact on policies.

The people experiencing poverty are members of National Networks. They use the newly obtained knowledge, skills and experiences in their networks and organizations. For example, people experiencing poverty introduced the European dimension to many networks and organizations. Before, these organizations were more focused on the local level. The more people experiencing poverty became involved, the more they helped their networks or NGOs to influence policy. In some cases, people experiencing poverty were employed by an NGO, and they could use their expertise to help this organization.

Through their personal development, people experiencing poverty have often become more engaged in attempting to influence and change policies. With their new social and cultural capital, they have become experts in poverty issues and have been able to develop specific dossiers and policy advice that are useful for policymakers. So, by their engagement in organizations and NGOs they have also had an influence on policies.

3.2. Impact on civil society organizations and institutions

The second research question – ‘Did the meetings have an impact on civil society organizations and institutions?’ – has already been partially answered. The results of the web survey show that most of the respondents think the meetings had an influence on civil society actors (3.1.3.) The policymakers are most convinced that the fight against poverty by civil society actors has been stimulated by the meetings. The NGOs themselves are rather negative about this impact. Nevertheless, the interviews and the qualitative analysis show five important indicators of the impact of the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty:

1. EAPN has become a **European authority** concerning poverty and social exclusion. Because of the meetings, this network has strengthened its position and gained more recognition, respect and the status of an expert. Of course, the meetings were not the only factor: the support of the National Networks in each member state gave EAPN a broad platform and support.

Because of the meetings, EAPN could bring their key issues to the civil society and policy agenda. Organizations paid more attention to people experiencing poverty and participation, and many organizations were encouraged to strengthen the participation of people experiencing poverty in their associations.

2. National Networks and organizations were **founded** and developed.
3. Some of these networks, organizations received funding or grants and **government support**. Partnerships with the government were launched. In several countries, more participation, consultation processes and direct dialogue was initiated in the field of poverty-reduction policies. Organizations or networks became recognized by Member States.
4. Some of the organizations started to organize **national meetings**, similar to the European meetings, which enhanced the dialogue with social workers, politicians, associations, social cooperatives, local administrations and people experiencing poverty. The national meetings also became a part of the preparation process for the European meetings. This is an initiative that shows considerable potential and that should be elaborated in the coming years.
5. Civil society actors such as National Networks, NGOs and institutions were **strengthened in their work** and lobbying.

Because of the meetings, they were **encouraged and empowered** to keep working on issues relating to poverty and participation.

The organizations **learned** about the participation of people experiencing poverty, about Europe, social policies, arguments with which to campaign, good practice for influencing policies, and to combat poverty. They learned from the different stakeholders, such as people experiencing poverty, policymakers and other organizations at the meetings.

It became easier to **lobby** because of the meetings and because of the membership of EAPN. More skills, insights and a higher visibility of the work of EAPN supported national and local actions.

Organizations established **new contacts and relations**, collaboration and/or aggregations between regional networks. They became empowered by fighting with several other NGOs for the same cause. Through contacts, collaboration and membership of EAPN and other NGOs, they represent a larger group of people, spanning beyond even national borders.

Some additional advice for the organizations and civil society actors at the meetings was formulated. Their role at the meetings must be better defined. They need to know what they can do and when they can intervene. In return, the NGOs must participate more actively and give more feedback about the meetings.

Similar to the situation regarding the impact of the meetings on people experiencing poverty, the impact of the meetings on organizations was broad. The impacts of the meetings on civil society actors had its effects for the impact on people experiencing poverty and the impact on policies.

Because of the meetings, EAPN brought their key issues on to the civil society agenda. Organizations started to pay more attention to people experiencing poverty and to participation. Many organizations were encouraged to strengthen the participation of people experiencing poverty in their associations. The meetings also generated a stronger awareness amongst NGOs about people experiencing poverty and built knowledge on participation and poverty. People experiencing poverty have become involved in National and local Networks and organizations and have been participating in similar national meetings.

The impact on organizations also involved policy results. The NGOs were able to put more pressure on policymakers, partnerships with governments were formed by which policies became influenced, and the national meetings have also put pressure on national policymakers. NGOs became more specialized in policy influence and in lobbying, with demonstrable results.

3.3. Impact on public policies

We come to our third question: 'Did the meetings have an impact on policies?' Most of the respondents to the web survey gave negative answers to this question. Only the policymakers were more positive. Although the impact on policies was limited, it may be said to be composed of five elements:

1. The meetings were useful for **agenda setting** at the European level as well as at the national level. The meetings have a political status because of the support of the EU Presidency, the European Commission and the presence of important policymakers such

as the president of the Social Protection Committee and social affairs ministers. Poverty, participation and other key topics were put on some national and EU agendas and became more visible. Important issues were brought to the attention of policymakers, including financial inclusion, minimum income, participation, governance, the situation of the Roma, energy poverty, homelessness and housing. The meetings established new top priorities on the EU agenda and removed taboos and prejudice atmospheres surrounding other topics. The terminology of the meetings has become widespread.

2. The meetings also had a threefold **impact on individual (national and European) policymakers**:

Politicians were **emotionally touched**, driven and enthusiastic. There was an attitude change from policymakers towards the issue of participation. The meetings gave a face to poverty and made poverty tangible.

The meetings were **a source of information** for politicians, alongside scientific research and statistics. They learned more about poverty, participation and the discussions were used as a reality-check for their own policy measures.

Alliances and **contacts** between politicians and people experiencing poverty, civil society actors and other politicians were developed.

3. The meetings (and their outcomes) were **referred to and mentioned in policy documents**, at policy events and by policymakers, at the European as well as the national level. The results were mentioned at the Round table on Poverty and Social Exclusion, the European Council, various European conferences, in the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion, by the European Commission, and became linked to the PROGRESS programme.
4. People experiencing poverty were **invited to other events**, including European events such as the Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion, the opening conference of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, and other European conferences and meetings.
5. The meetings put **pressure** on governments and policymakers to do something about participation and poverty. Poverty was kept on the agenda, NGOs collaborated to enhance their impact and national policymakers now know that their policies will be discussed and criticized by people experiencing poverty at a higher, European policy level.

The respondents also mentioned **very specific outcomes**. Of course, for many of these outcomes the European meetings were not the only influencing factor, but one of the many that made these policy outcomes possible. The following outcomes were identified:

- The existence of the meetings itself and their annual organization, already now held for the 9th time.
- The SPC based recommendations on proposals of the meetings and of EAPN.

- The Europe 2020 strategy has poverty reduction as one of its goals and a target of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty in ten years.
- The 'European Platform against Poverty' is included in the Europe 2020 strategy.
- Active inclusion was a topic on the two latest and the next 'Round table on poverty and social exclusion'.
- The designation of 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion was influenced by the meetings.
- Plans are being made to create a commission to give policy advice about child poverty and well-being.
- Networks, organizations, meetings and the preparation process gained recognition, support and/or grants from governments.
- National direct dialogue.

It needs to be mentioned that several respondents also said they do not see any positive effects of the meetings on policies. The risk is real that the meetings will be used as a substitute for concrete policies about poverty.

Many of the participants said that it was the informal moments at the meetings that were very useful in terms of influencing policies and policymakers.

The results of the interviews may be too positive about the impact of the meetings on policies, because many respondents are convinced of the added value of the meetings, but are afraid that if they do not say the meetings have policy outcomes, the meetings might be abolished.

The respondents proposed **seven recommendations** in order to enhance the policy impact of the meetings:

1. Better **preparation**: fewer national differences in the preparation processes and more financial support for the national preparation process.
2. **More European policymakers** (MEPs, SPC-members, people from 'hard' DGs), more heads of state and government and higher-level politicians, more political administrators and more SPC members should be present at the meetings. There should, however, not be too many politicians at the meetings and there needs to be a diversity of politicians.
3. More **strategic planning** is needed.
4. More **media attention** needs to be attracted, not necessarily only traditional media, but also new media.
5. The **larger the audience** that is reached, the greater the impact on policies. To widen public awareness about the meetings, they need to be better promoted.
6. The meetings need to involve **more concrete topics**, policy questions and realistic policy advice. More targets and specific objectives should be highlighted.

7. The meeting **reports need to be more widely distributed**, more concrete, better written-out and used. These reports should also have a page devoted to the situation in each country they are published in.

It is evident that the impact of the meetings on policies has also had a knock-on impact on people experiencing poverty and on civil society actors. Almost all the policies mentioned have an impact on the daily lives of people experiencing poverty and on the work of organizations.

3.4. Participation at the meetings

The last research question was not about the impact but: 'How could participation at the meetings be improved?'

In the results of the web survey, the participation process at the meetings was evaluated as almost perfect. Everyone felt that they have had the opportunity to speak and contribute, regardless of the languages they spoke. Participation processes can, however, always be improved. The respondents gave **10 suggestions for the organization of the meetings**:

1. **Good preparation** needs to be guaranteed in order to ensure a good participation process. People experiencing poverty need to be encouraged, prepared, informed, have realistic expectations, have documents in their own language, become more disciplined, etc.
2. There needs to be more time for the **workshops** and they need to be smaller. During the meetings and workshops it is better to focus on only one concrete topic. The location of the workshops and the meetings needs to be clearly explained and directions to them must be clearly specified.
3. **More politicians and NGOs present should be present** and they need to give fewer speeches and instead participate more actively. They need to show their interest and respect and engage in a real dialogue with the people experiencing poverty.
4. There needs to be **a balanced mix of political participation and individual stories**.
5. The people experiencing poverty need to have more (bottom-up) impact on **and input into the agenda** of the meetings.
6. It must be taken into consideration that the new and formal environment of the meetings can be frightening for new delegates. The meetings are stressful and far-reaching. The luxury environment is impressive and overwhelming. People experiencing poverty must be made **to feel at ease and comfortable**.
7. A solution is needed for **language issues**. Not knowing English prevents direct exchange during the informal moments. Because most of the delegations speak only one language, they cannot split up and spread their knowledge over different workshops.

Politicians need to adjust the language they use and non-verbal communication needs to be improved.

8. The meetings need to take into account **the daily problems and indirect costs of people** experiencing poverty, such as the problems involved in combining employment and participation, the absence of childcare arrangements, stress, and airline tickets that need to be paid in advance by the people experiencing poverty.
9. (Cultural) **differences, particular contexts and specific expertise** need to be taken into account. There must be a balanced mix of 'new' participants, who bring in new inputs, and 'old' delegates, for whom it is easier to participate. More attention should be paid to the needs of the less confident and most marginalized people. The organizers must overcome some limitations with regard to accommodating people with disabilities. All the venues need to be easily accessible.
10. The meetings need to have a sufficient **follow-up process**, otherwise people experiencing poverty may become frustrated. Participation at the meetings needs to be evaluated continuously and politicians and the organizers need to give feedback about what happened with the recommendations of previous meetings. The reports and the results need to be provided in every relevant language.

Participation at the meetings can also be linked to our three impact questions. When the participation process is better, the meetings will have more impact on people experiencing poverty. They will be more inclusive and it will be easier for participants to take the floor and to speak at other occasions and events. The more active and interested policymakers and civil society actors are, the better the participation process becomes. The better the participation process at the meetings, the better the example of participation that is given to NGOs and policymakers.

3.5. The importance of contextualising the European meetings in the broader EU Inclusion strategy

It became clear that in order to strengthen the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the **participation of people experiencing poverty may never be limited to the annual European Meetings** of People Experiencing Poverty, no matter how good the preparation and follow up processes are for the European meeting. The research indicates that what was key to the meetings having real value was that the meetings and the preparation and follow up of the meetings were part of, and contributed to, **a broader strategy**, namely the Lisbon strategy and in particular the OMC on social inclusion and social protection. Ensuring the active participation of people experiencing poverty within the broader EU Inclusion strategy was clearly the original intention of the Belgian EU-Presidency when they instigated these European meetings. The future development of the meetings can not be detached from the broader EU strategy to fight poverty.

It is clear that part of the possibility of the meetings in relation to their impact on policy is directly linked to the extent to which there is **local and national stakeholder engagement** (including people experiencing poverty) in local and national action plans on poverty and

social exclusion as part of an EU strategy. The chance of the meeting to be rooted in a real participation process requires that the European meetings are contextualized and developed within European, national and local frameworks. This requires that the currently negative evolution, with fewer opportunities for stakeholder engagement in the EU Inclusion strategy -particularly within Member States- must be addressed in the context of the **Platform against Poverty and the Europe 2020 strategy**.

Guaranteeing that the Platform builds on the strengths of the OMC and includes **real mechanisms for stakeholder engagement** in national and local platforms as well as European processes (including: the continuation of the European meetings of people experiencing poverty, the Annual Round Table on Inclusion, other key conferences and events, support for European Networks who facilitate the participation of people experiencing etc) will be essential. It is also essential that people experiencing poverty continue to be explicitly identified as one of the key stakeholders to be engaged. Guaranteeing that **people experiencing poverty are formally part of this Flagship Platform** will not only enhance the continuity and follow up of the annual European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty but should also ensure that other processes are strengthened and developed which contribute to the direct participation of people experiencing poverty. It is also clearly evident that the participation of people experiencing poverty requires many different types of support including financial support. The future development of the OMC and the Platform against poverty must ensure that this necessary support is available.

This report identifies **the added value that the direct participation** of people experiencing poverty brings to the fight against poverty in terms of contributing a unique and important knowledge that is essential to ensure success in combating poverty. The people who have responded to this research have perceived that the knowledge coming from the delegates to the European meetings is useful in the design and implementation of policies to fight against poverty. To build increased support for investing and engaging in participation processes it is essential that there is a wide spread understanding of the value that participation brings to policy making and implementation. The European meetings have contributed and must consciously **continue to contribute and to demonstrate that the knowledge and experience of people who live in poverty** is an essential element of successful strategy to fight poverty. The policy makers, political representatives and representatives of other actors who engage in these participation processes must work to ensure that knowledge and expertise coming from the lived realities of people who face poverty and social exclusion becomes a source to inform policy making, implementation and follow up.

3.6. Summary

We may conclude that the meetings had a threefold impact. Their biggest impact was on the personal development of people experiencing poverty. The meetings had less impact in terms of influencing policies. Participation in the meetings was evaluated as very good. The impact on civil society actors, institutions and the public debate could be improved.

It is important, though, to remember that the answers to the research questions differ per category of respondents. Moreover, they are influenced by the various national contexts and experiences.

The interviews and case studies gave a good impression of the broad diversity of participation processes. Each country is different in terms of its participation tradition, its vision of participation, its poverty policies, etc. Fighting poverty with participation of people experiencing poverty places significant demands on existing systems. Politicians, civil society actors and people experiencing poverty are asked to collaborate and negotiate about priorities, methods and strategies. This is a difficult task. In order to support these different practices, further scientific research on the participation opportunities and processes in the Member States of the EU should also be undertaken. This research report also suggests that a peer review of the participation of people experiencing poverty in poverty-reduction policies would be desirable. Overall, the main advice concerns the structural embedding of participation in the Europe 2020 strategy and the Flagship Platform against Poverty.

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This report has been written by the OASeS team with guidance of a steering committee which involved representatives of the Belgian Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration, the European Commission and EAPN. Five National EAPN Networks shared their experience of building participation in case studies, including Belgium, Lithuania, Italy, Norway and Poland. Contributions from EAPN were facilitated by Fintan Farrell, Micheline Gerondal and Tanya Basarab.

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EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

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