

EAPN Ireland Review

European Anti Poverty Network Ireland

April-May 2014



Special Issue

Putting the fight against poverty at the heart of the
European Parliament elections





EAPN (Europe) strategy meeting on European Elections, Brussels, 2013

Putting the fight against poverty at the heart of the European Parliament elections

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1. Participants at the European Meeting of People with Experience of Poverty, 2013, outside the European Parliament, Brussels.
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A. A Parliament for a Social Europe

For people struggling to make ends meet, the European Parliament elections may seem very remote. It is tempting either to ignore the elections entirely or to use them to make a statement about national politics or the personalities of candidates.

This would be a big mistake.

Over the next five years, the European Union and its member states will take fundamental decisions about what type of society and economy to rebuild after the recession. These decisions will affect us all but they will be felt most acutely by people on low income and in poverty. The European Parliament will play an important role both in decision-making and in bringing these debates out into a more public arena.

The Parliament's importance does not come just from its enhanced powers. It also comes from the moral authority of representing the most visibly democratic and open of the triangle of institutions, Council, Commission and Parliament, which drive the EU.

Recently, we have seen the Parliament insisting on the Commission proposal that 25% of European funds go to the Social Fund, and 20% of this be used to fight poverty; taking a highly critical view of the Troika strategies; pushing for a strong EU initiative on homelessness and insisting that the issue of an adequate minimum income go back on the table.

For this reason, the European Anti Poverty Network is putting more time and energy into the elections in 2014 than ever before. Our priorities are to encourage our members, who are local, regional and national organisations representing and working with people affected by poverty, to engage with candidates and parties and to make sure that the eradication of poverty and building a more inclusive Europe are central to the campaign debates and the work of the European Parliament.

A Social Pact for a Social Europe

If the Parliament is to be taken seriously as a reflection of public opinion, it needs to insist on ambitious social objectives for the European Union and ensure that economic policies contribute to these social objectives.

These objectives need to be backed up by actions and measurable targets for the inter-related areas of quality jobs, services available to all and adequate income.

Europe's heads of government have adopted objectives for poverty reduction, both in the 10-year economic, social and environmental development strategy 'Europe 2020', adopted in 2010, and in its predecessor, the Lisbon Agenda of 2000.

However, these have been undermined and even reversed by the economic policies followed by the EU and its members.

The latest European statistics show 124 million people across the EU 'at risk of poverty', up 10 million since 2009.

The European Parliament needs to take a stronger role in monitoring the development and delivery of policies, ensuring a level of accountability which is missing at present.

This will be particularly urgent in the crucial mid-term review of Europe 2020 which will start this year. It is also important that the Parliament insist on an open and effective monitoring of the social impact of the new processes which will involve much closer EU scrutiny of national budgets.

The new Parliament also needs to work out how to follow up its recent resolution on an EU strategy to tackle the rising scandal of homelessness.

The Parliament will also play an important part in the debate about whether key services are organised for people or for profit.

The resources to live with dignity

One immediate priority will be for the new Parliament to champion the introduction of European legislation, in the form of a Directive, on Minimum Income.

Minimum income, which is the basic 'safety-net' welfare varies widely across Europe.

In a single economic market, there is a temptation for Governments to cut spending and taxation, as well as wages and welfare, in order to attract investment from each other. This can lead to a 'race to the bottom' in income, supports and services affecting the poorest.

Inadequate minimum income schemes trap people in extreme poverty, and lead to greater social, health and economic costs.

The debate on an effective EU approach to minimum income has dragged on since at least 1992, when an initiative of the then Delors Presidency of the Commission led to little real action.

The European Parliament has put the issue firmly back on the table with a resolution in 2010 on *"the role of minimum income in combating poverty and promoting an inclusive society in Europe"*, calling on member states to establish a threshold for minimum income, based on relevant indicators. According to the Parliament, adequate minimum income schemes must set minimum incomes at a level equivalent to at least 60% of median income in the member state concerned.¹

As Pervenche Berès, the Chairperson of the (outgoing) European Parliament's Employment

and Social Affairs Committee, said in March 2014, the possibility of an EU Directive to ensure the progressive realization of adequate Minimum Income Schemes in every EU country is *"an exciting development that needs to be part of the discussions in the European Election campaigns and which should be brought quickly on the agenda of the newly elected Parliament"*.

The challenge for the new Parliament will be to move from this commitment in principle to legislation which will make a difference to people's lives.

Racism on the rise

This could be the election where parties opposed to free movement of people and openly promoting racism, xenophobia and discrimination could top the polls in several member states, possibly including large countries like France and the UK.

This makes it particularly urgent for the other parties to commit strongly to the basic European principles of non-discrimination and the rights of ethnic minorities, including particularly Roma and Travellers, and migrants

In this issue, we present some of the issues in this election and a guide to how the Parliament works, as well as the views of some of the candidates.

We hope that you will join us in the long struggle for a social Europe free from poverty.

Robin Hanan, EAPN Ireland, April 2014



Delegates bring messages from the EAPN Ireland/CWC regional meetings on poverty to the Social Inclusion Forum, 2013

¹ EP Resolution on the role of minimum income in combating poverty and promoting an inclusive society in Europe, July 2010.

B. ELECTING CHAMPIONS FOR A SOCIAL EUROPE

EAPN (Europe)'s Manifesto for the Elections

With levels of trust in the European Union as low as 33% and trust in National Governments even lower at 27%, the big loser of the 2014 European Parliament elections could be democracy itself. With the realities of growing levels of poverty, inequality and xenophobia, fuelled by the dominance in the EU and Member States of policies of competitiveness and austerity, instead of cohesion and redistribution, democracy is already in a fragile condition

Despite these realities, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) asserts that democratically elected representatives are part of the solution and calls on people to make their vote count in the European Parliament Elections

This new Parliament should build on the achievements of previous European Parliaments such as pushing for the Youth Guarantee or ensuring a more social EU Budget 2014-2020. Thanks to the driving force of the EP in defending the minimum shares of the ESF, including the 20% earmarked for poverty reduction and the Fund for European Aid to the most deprived, Europe may be able to better deliver on the Europe 2020 poverty reduction target. Future Parliamentarians must ensure that Member States use that money



properly and effectively to combat poverty and social exclusion

Poverty is not inevitable and can be eradicated in the EU and globally. It's not a problem of scarce resources. If we avoid greed and waste and share what we have equitably and sustainably, through fairer redistribution the eradication of poverty is possible!

The good news is that more equal societies perform better for almost everyone and strong universal welfare states achieve greater equality while preventing and eradicating poverty. It is therefore not a surprise that those countries are more resilient to the current crisis and continue to perform better than those countries with lesser social protection.

International governmental institutions have an important role to play to ensure cooperation between countries to foster high level social standards and to find innovative solutions regarding distribution and redistribution of resources, goods and services, between and within countries. This role becomes even more vital in the context of a more globalised world. The European Parliament could play a vital role to ensure the European Union develops in this direction

WE WANT

1. A Social Pact for a Social Europe
2. An effective EU Strategy to fight poverty, social exclusion, inequalities and discrimination
3. Strengthened democracy and civil-society participation
4. An annual Hearing with people experiencing poverty in the European Parliament

Details of these are on the next page

EAPN (Europe) Manifesto (Continued)

1. A Social Pact for a Social Europe

- Setting ambitious social objectives for the European Union and ensuring that economic policies contribute to these social objectives and that social rights are not subject to the follies of market freedoms
- Safeguarding our social protection system independent of demographic changes
- Bringing an end to the failed austerity policies with an approach based on solidarity between all the Member States
- Giving priority to reducing inequality and poverty through ensuring tax justice and an end to tax havens
- Supporting high universal quality social protection seen as an investment and an economic stabiliser fostering inclusive growth
- Ensuring that the next revision of the European Treaties will allow for specific directives to achieve greater cooperation to protect and build high level social standards in Europe

2. An effective EU Strategy to fight Poverty, Social Exclusion and Discrimination

- Based on access for all to Rights, Goods and Services and ensuring access to – housing, education, health, adequate social protection and minimum income as part of an effective social protection floor
- That requires ambitious Poverty Targets and multidimensional integrated national strategies and anti-poverty programmes to achieve them, backed up with relevant thematic strategies such as strategies on child and/or elderly poverty, homelessness, Roma and inclusion of migrants
- That addresses job creation and the positive role of the social economy
- That backs access to quality work for all those who can and support for

participation and a decent life for those who can't

- That addresses the gender dimensions of poverty and social exclusion and ensures that anti-discrimination concerns are mainstreamed in anti-poverty policies.
- That achieves concrete progress on high EU level social standards, starting with a Directive on Adequate Minimum Income Schemes
- That closely monitors the implementation of the earmarking of the 20% of ESF for poverty reduction by Member States through a genuine partnership principle at programming and delivery level
- Based on clear EU and national budgets to support its implementation ensuring support for grass-roots and NGO initiatives

3. Strengthened democracy and civil society participation

- European Parliament as equal partners in EU decision-making – including in the social sphere
- Ensure transparency and accountability in EU decision-making with processes to hold elected representatives and high level officials accountable for the decisions they take including respecting commitments in agreed International Human Rights Frameworks
- Participation and Empowerment at the heart of policy development, implementation and evaluation, including recognition and concrete support for the participation of civil society, including anti-poverty NGOs and people experiencing poverty, in meaningful dialogue at EU and national levels
- .An annual Hearing in the European Parliament with people living in Poverty building on similar processes at national level.

The agreed Europe 2020 Strategy, with its aim of inclusive growth, its target for poverty reduction, agreed social guidelines and commitment to partnership approaches provides a basis for achieving many of the proposals outlined above. We call on candidates to commit to ensuring that such a balanced strategy replaces narrow economic governance as the driver of EU cooperation and to ensure that the spending of the EU Cohesion Funds reflect these priorities.

C. The European Parliament - a brief guide

By Paul Ginnell and Martin Keating

1. What is the European Parliament?

The European Parliament (EP), set up in 1952, has been directly elected since 1972.

It is one of the three main European Union institutions which decide policies and laws, along with the European Commission and the Council of the European Union (made up of the EU Governments).

The Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected by the citizens of the EU every five years. There are currently 766 MEPs representing the 28 Member States (reduced to 751 after the 2014 election.)



2. What does the European Parliament do?

The European Parliament has four main functions:

- **Legislation:** along with the Council of Ministers, the Parliament is responsible for passing EU laws drawn up by the European Commission.
- **Budgetary powers:** the European Parliament shares the power with the Council to decide on the entire annual budget and seven yearly budgetary plan of the European Union.
- **Supervisory powers:** the Parliament exercises supervisory powers over the Union's activities, including overseeing how the budget is spent. For example, it can approve or reject the appointment of the Commission, and keeps a watch on both the Commission and the Council through structured input to their meetings and putting written and oral questions to them. The Parliament also selects the EU Ombudsman (currently Emily O'Reilly from Ireland) and has a growing role in choosing the members of the European Central Bank, the

European Court of Auditors, and the Directors and certain members of the management boards of many EU agencies.

- **Relations with national parliaments:** The European Parliament maintains close links with the Member States' national parliaments through regular meetings. It keeps the Member States' national parliaments informed of its activities and the Parliament committees invite members of the national parliaments to their meetings to discuss new Commission legislative proposals.

The powers of the European Parliament have increased with each revision of the European Treaties (on page 11, Francis Jacobs explains some recent extensions to the powers).

Legislation

In general, the Commission proposes new legislation, but it is the Council and the Parliament that hold the power to pass the laws. In some areas, the Council holds sole power in passing laws, but in most areas of legislation new laws can only be passed when

jointly adopted by both the Council and the Parliament. This method of enacting laws by way of joint adoption is referred to as *ordinary legislative procedure*. The European Parliament has steadily, over time, moved from being essentially a consultative body to one that now has a range of real powers.

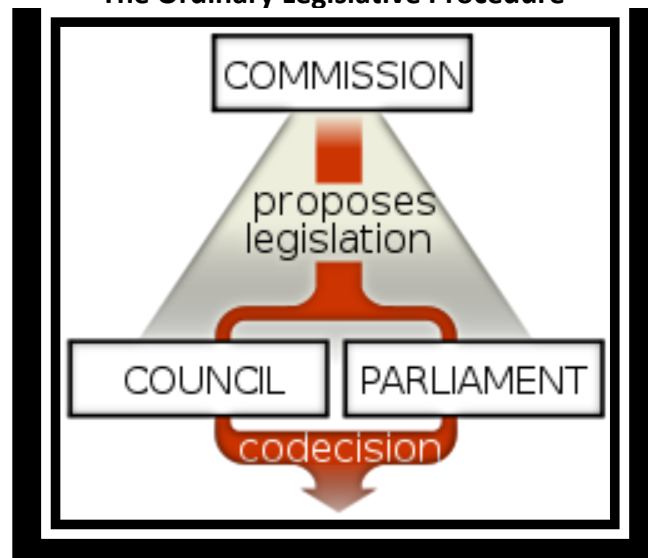
The Parliament is thus involved in making European legislation in a number of ways depending on the policy area:

(1) Ordinary Legislative Procedure (previously known as Co-decision), where the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (EU Governments) share power equally in finalising legislation. This also increases contacts between the Parliament and the Council, the co-legislators, and with the European Commission, which proposes the legislation.

If Council and Parliament cannot agree on a piece of proposed legislation, it is put before a 'conciliation committee', composed of equal numbers of Council and Parliament representatives. Once this committee has reached an agreement, the text is sent once again to Parliament and the Council so that they can finally adopt a law.

(2) Consultation: In some areas, the Parliament may approve or reject a legislative proposal, or propose amendments to it. The Council is not legally obliged to take account of Parliament's opinion but it must not take a decision without having received

The Ordinary Legislative Procedure



it. This is only used in areas such as internal market exemptions and competition law. It can also be used where international agreements are being adopted under the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

(3) Consent: This gives Parliament the right to veto some legislation. It can therefore accept or reject a legislative proposal without proposing amendments and this has to be accepted by the Council. Consent is also required as a non-legislative procedure when the Council is adopting certain international agreements. It can be used when new legislation on combating discrimination is being adopted. It can also be used in the cases of serious breach of fundamental rights or for the accession of new EU members or arrangements for the withdrawal from the EU.

3. How does the European Parliament work?

The Parliament's work is carried out in two main ways:

a. Plenary session

Meetings of the whole Parliament are known as 'plenary sessions'. Preparing for the plenary session is done by MEP's in various parliamentary committees that specialise in particular areas of EU activity. The issues for

debates are also discussed by the political groups.

At these sessions, Parliament examines proposed legislation and votes on amendments before coming to a decision on the text as a whole.

b. Standing Committees

Standing Committees prepare Parliamentary reports on proposed legislation from the European Commission or Council and *own-initiative* reports. The Committee meetings are normally held in public. Each of the 20 Standing Committees is led by a Chair and four Vice-Chairs. Along with a large number of committee members, each committee also has several substitute members. In general, most MEPs are full members of at least one committee and may be substitute members in at least one more.

Parliamentary reports are compiled by a 'Rapporteur', who is appointed by a Chair of the committee, and is selected from amongst the members or permanent substitutes. This is a very important role. Each of the other political groups appoints its own 'Shadow Rapporteur' who acts as their spokesperson on the same issues. Committee "coordinators" – who are the leading spokespersons for each Political Group on a committee – also play a vital role in the running of the committees. Sometimes these roles are combined with those of the Shadow Rapporteur.

Where relevant, Standing Committees can also give opinions on the reports of other committees and inform the final report.

In addition to Standing Committees, the Parliament also sets up special temporary committees, committees of inquiry, and 'inter-groups'. Inter-groups are usually informal in nature and may contain members with similar concerns and interests from different countries and political groups. For example, EAPN has worked with ATD Fourth World to support the inter-group on poverty.

The Parliament also works in other ways outside its legislative role to influence developments in the EU. The Parliament's Committees can develop Own-Initiative reports can play an important role, such as the report of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee on the role and operations of the Troika in euro area programme countries which was adopted by the plenary of the Parliament on the 13th March 2014. The European Parliament also passes resolutions. In January 2014, for example, it passed a resolution on an EU homelessness strategy.

4. The Political groups in the European Parliament

Currently there are 7 political groups in the European Parliament. The Parliament also includes several non-attached members.

The Parliament's decision-making procedure has developed along relatively consensual lines. Most decisions are made through

compromises between the groups, particularly the largest two, the centre-right European People's Party and European Democrats (EPP-ED) and the centre-left Party of European Socialists and Democrats (S&D)

European Political groups, their Irish members and numbers in the outgoing Parliament

European Political Groups	Irish Parties	MEPs 2009-14
European People's Party & European Democrats (EPP-ED)	Fine Gael	274
Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S&D)	Labour	195
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE)	Fianna Fail (& Marian Harkin, Ind.)	85
Greens-European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA)	Green Party	58
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)	none	56
European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)	Socialist Party (Sinn Fein)	35
Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD)	none	33
Not attached to any group – Non-Inscripts (NI)	none	30

D. The changing role of the European Parliament

Francis Jacobs, Head of European Parliament Information Office in Ireland



The 2014 European Parliament elections will take place across the 28 EU Member between 22-25 May to choose 751 MEPs, of which 11 will be from Ireland, to serve for the five year term from 2014-2019.

How important are these elections? The quick answer is more important than ever before, firstly because the European Parliament, as a result of the Lisbon Treaty, has more powers than it did in the last EP elections in 2009, and secondly because of its reinforced role in the choice of the President of the European Commission.

The European Parliament now has the power of co-decision with the Member States on almost all areas of European law. This means that it has the power to amend or even reject the vast majority of EU laws, including those areas of particular concern for the EAPN on economic and social policy, as well as fighting unemployment and poverty.

Of equal importance is the fact that the European Parliament now has a key role in determination of the annual and longer-term EU budget, and hence on the overall amount of funds available, as well as on the distribution of those funds between different programmes and policies.

The European Parliament can also say yes or no to future EU enlargement to specific countries, and must give its assent to all EU international agreements such as trade deals. It has an important role in the negotiation of new EU Treaties, and can propose amendments to them.

Besides its law-making powers the EP is also a forum for ideas and debate, such as when it

recently adopted an initiative report criticising the operation of the Troika in countries such as Ireland

A less familiar role of the European Parliament is its involvement, direct or indirect, in the choice of many EU decision-makers, such as the President of the European Central Bank, the EU Ombudsman, and Members of the European Court of Auditors. All of these are subject to hearings within the European Parliament before they are formally appointed which help to identify their policy priorities and strengths and weaknesses.

The most striking example of this power is in the choice of the European Commission, where the European Parliament elects the new President, holds confirmation hearings for each prospective member of his or her team, and then votes yes or no to the European Commission as a whole.

For the first time this year five of the European Political Parties have put forward their Europe-wide candidates to be President of the Commission, and the idea is that the candidate whose group wins most seats will have first choice in trying to command a majority within the EP. How this will work out is still unclear, as is the reaction of the national leaders in the European Council, but it should certainly add a new European and not just purely national dimension to the campaign.

The people you elect, therefore, as your MEPs will have a key role to play in Europe's decisions of the next five years, and also in the defence of your national, regional or other interests in the European Parliament.

E. Candidates for the European Parliament Elections, 2014

11 Seats in 3 Constituencies



Party	Dublin (3 seats)	South (4)	Midlands-North-West (4)
Fianna Fail	Mary Fitzpatrick	Brian Crowley Kieran Hartley	Thomas Byrne Pat The Cope Gallagher
Fine Gael	Brian Hayes	Deirdre Clune Simon Harris Sean Kelly	Jim Higgins Mairead McGuinness
Green Party	Eamon Ryan	Grace O'Sullivan	Mark Dearey
Labour Party	Emer Costello	Phil Prendergast	Lorraine Higgins
People Before Profit	Brid Smith		
Sinn Fein	Lynn Boylan	Liadh Ni Riada	Matt Carthy
Socialist Party	Paul Murphy		
Independents	Nessa Childers	Diarmuid O'Flynn Jan Van De Ven Jillian Godsil	Mark Fitzsimons Luke Ming Flanagan Marian Harkin Ronan Mullen

We asked all of the candidates:

What are your social policy priorities for the next European Parliament, with particular emphasis on the fight against poverty?



**Nessa Childers,
Independent, Dublin**

Poverty in this country is now spiralling: families are going hungry; 400,000 people are out of work; emigration is widespread, and basics such as heating your home are become luxury.

As a sitting MEP, I am delighted to attend the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland workshop on May 2 in Dublin's city centre. Since my election to the European Parliament in 2009, I have voted and campaigned for greater tax justice across Europe, as well as the introduction of a Financial Transaction Tax. If re-elected, I will continue this work, and campaign for a living wage across Europe.

The most important issue now is returning social solidarity to the heart of EU policy.



Emer Costello
Labour, Dublin

My main social policy priority would be to see real progress towards a more social and democratic Europe:

Firstly, I want to see the adoption of a coherent European anti-poverty strategy - that promotes minimum income schemes, guarantees high-quality and accessible public services and tackles discrimination outside employment.

Secondly, I want to see the adoption of a European Social Pact - that lays down common standards to be guaranteed across Europe - on public services, fundamental labour and social rights, social protection and equal pay and conditions for work of equal value.

Thirdly we need a specific focus on social investments such as childcare and pre-school education, retraining and up-skilling workers. We must place the same emphasis on investing in people as we do on stabilising our public finances.

Finally, I want to see a greater role for civil society in EU policy-making, building on the inclusive framework inserted into the FEAD programme.



Liadh Ní Riada
Sinn Féin, South

The central issue here is that the erosion of the social elements of EU policy has been taking place more than ten years now.

Smaller, peripheral states such as Ireland are bearing the brunt of that in terms of increasing poverty and unemployment.

EU policy needs to be reoriented to focus on reducing poverty and way from benefiting the very wealthy and large corporations. There is no silver bullet. This must be done in a holistic fashion and with a political will to campaign for EU policies that will improve our social and physical infrastructure.

Sinn Féin proposals at EU level that would help the fight against poverty include:

1. Inserting social progress clauses into EU treaties to place social rights over the freedom of the markets
2. A real youth guarantee fund to tackle the youth unemployment crisis in the EU
3. A new deal on the promissory note lifting this odious debt from our children and grandchildren
4. A Fairer distribution of agricultural supports to smaller struggling family farms
5. A move to a flat rate of Single Farm Payment with greater support for the disadvantaged areas.

F. WOMEN RISING IN ELECTIONS 2014



National Women's Council of Ireland

Ireland lags behind the rest of Europe when it comes to women's participation in national politics (26%) and on corporate boards (10%). In other words, over 84% of Dáil seats and nearly 90% of seats on corporate boards are held by men. Women are, proportionately speaking, largely absent from the spaces where critical decision making takes place.

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) and our members were delighted, following years of campaigning, with the introduction of legislative gender quotas at general election time.

Quotas do not apply to the European and Local elections. Nevertheless, parties are approaching the elections of May 2014 as an opportunity to encourage more women to run for election, to gain experience both in campaigning, and they hope, in politics.

Aside from the critical issue of representation, we are also working to ensure that the broad range of issues that affect women in Ireland today are put on the agenda for the election. Through the Women Rising Café series, we have created a space for discussing the issues in our manifesto; women in decision making, violence against women, economic equality, health and reproductive rights, and equal and inclusive communities. We wanted to provide an opportunity for candidates, female and male to meet and network with our members, as their constituents, in a way that there was equality of voice through a series of small themed discussion groups, allowing all participants to have their say.

The series launched in Dublin, travelled to Cork, and will visit Cavan. The meetings have been a great success, with strong engagement from our members. One of the key messages that we want to deliver from these meetings is that every issue has a gender perspective, and we are calling on

candidates to consider both the visible and invisible gender dimension on the issues that they are dealing with at local, national and European levels. We are also calling on people to get out and vote. In particular if there is a woman on the ballot paper and she appropriately represents your views – vote for her.

We are concerned of the high numbers of women that choose to retire their seat. As of January, 2014, 72.7% of retired or retiring councillors in the Dublin City local authority area were women². This is an extremely high figure given there is such chronic underrepresentation of women in the first instance. Post-election, in an effort to address this attrition rate, we will work to build on the positive response to 'A Parliament of All Talents: Building a Women Friendly Oireachtas'. This report looks at one of the main barriers to women's political participation; culture. Quotas are a key tool for increasing the number of women elected to parliament, but the system must adapt to ensure that the increased numbers of women that will hopefully be elected under the quota system will be supported and enabled to enjoy a long political career, and to bring about meaningful change. The six recommendations made in this report seek to create a more woman and family friendly parliament.

² <http://adriankavanaghelections.org/2014/01/14/retiring-countycity-councillors/>

G. The Active Citizenship/Voter Education Programme and the 2014 Elections

Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice

How do you begin to work for social and economic change – tackling poverty and exclusion in Ireland? This was the question which faced the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) on its foundation in 1995. It was a particularly relevant question for the person who was appointed to establish the strategy and activities which

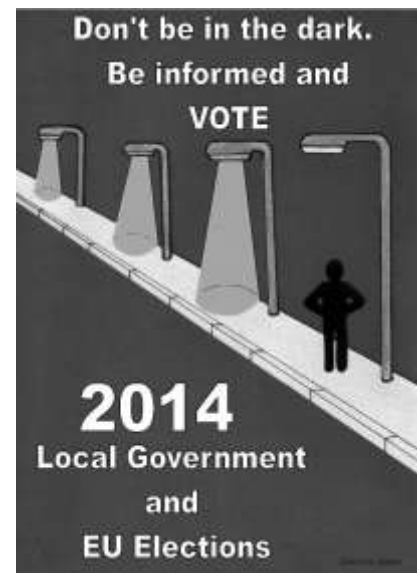
An Internship in a Justice Office of NETWORK - a Washington based organisation of women working for a more just society in the US - led to the introduction to a Voter Education Programme. This programme is non-party political and is based on the principles of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher. It was developed to encourage the large number of non-voters in America to engage in the electoral process and have their voices heard.

While voter turnout in Ireland was higher than in the US it fell from 76% in 1967 to 62% in 2002. It was less than 20% in a number of communities in disadvantaged areas. Politicians were perceived as absent, without interest and making promises which were always broken. People became alienated from the democratic electoral process. As a result the voices of the majority of disadvantaged people were silent. The VPSJ decided that the promotion of Active Citizenship/Voter Education with communities in areas of low voter turnout would become a strategy in the effort to promote a more inclusive and just society In

would help to achieve the goals of the Partnership. How in Ireland do you begin to work for a more just and inclusive Ireland with people experiencing poverty, injustice and exclusion? Also how do you do so with one person, scarce resources and a commitment to working with people rather than for them?!

time a second strategy emerged – the provision of facts and figures on how much people need to spend in order to have a minimum essential standard of living.

With the support of volunteers the VPSJ began in 1996 to facilitate an Active Citizenship/Voter Education Programme (AC/VEP) through a series of workshops. Slowly the work became known. Members of a Community Employment Scheme were trained as facilitators; a grant from the Dormant Account Fund enabled the employment of a Co-ordinator for 3 years and the development of the website www.vote.ie (which provides information on the election workshops and matters relating to elections). By 2002 workshops had been facilitated throughout the country and approximately 300 community workers trained as facilitators. Evaluations showed that participants found the workshops to be enjoyable, affirming, informative and transformative. People's perceptions of their rights and responsibilities as a voter had changed.



Facilitating Workshops in Preparation for Local Government and EU 2014 Elections

Since September 2013 the VPSJ has been facilitating workshops in Dublin and 11 other counties in preparation for the May 2014 Local Government and European Parliament elections. Participants are members of diverse groups – e.g. adult education co-ordinators, youth groups, members of the Travelling community, community workers, people with learning difficulties, immigrants. Many of the groups with which the VPSJ has worked in preparation for previous elections are no longer in existence. Others have reduced funding. A grant from the Loreto Foundation meant that work with groups which had very limited funding is largely subsidised.

The themes explored in The Local Government and EU election work were:-

Local Elections

- The need for local government; the impact of local government; the role of local councillor; the when and the how of local elections and choosing a local Councillor.

European Parliament Elections

- The beginning and growth of the E.U; areas of agreement and E.U. Treaties; how the E.U. is governed and opportunities and challenges associated with E.U. membership and European elections

Some feedback from participants of the recent workshops:-

- “I did not expect politics to be so interesting”
- “The Local Government workshops helped me to understand the 8

Programme Areas for which local councillors are responsible”

- “I got a new picture of what local councillors are supposed to do for my area”
- “The EU meant nothing to me until now. I like the vision behind the EU peace and prosperity”
- “I have a better idea of the responsibilities of MEPs and hope we get 11 good ones to represent Ireland and to speak up”
- “I am glad the Parliament will have more power”
- “I think the EU is a mixed bag – but it is better to be in than out”

Voting in the Local and European Elections

You can vote on

23 MAY 2014 From 7am to 10pm

- Everyone living in the area can vote in the local elections
- Every citizen of an EU country can vote in the European Parliament elections

BUT you must be registered to vote.

To see if you are registered, go to www.checktheregister.ie or a Garda station, post office or library.

You can have your name added to the register before 6 May. To be added to the register for a postal vote, you must apply by 26 April

IF YOU ARE NOT REGISTERED YOU CANNOT VOTE!

IF YOU DON'T VOTE YOUR VOICE WON'T BE HEARD!

EAPN Ireland

Established in 1990, EAPN Ireland is a network of groups and individuals working against poverty. It is the Irish national network of the **European Anti Poverty Network** (EAPN Europe).

EAPN Ireland is made up of over two hundred local, regional and national anti-poverty organisations and individuals. EAPN Ireland supports members to understand and influence national and European policy through training, information, collective action and networking.

EAPN Ireland places particular importance on the involvement of people affected by poverty in working for the policies which will effect their lives.

Some current areas of activity include:

- Bringing the views of anti-poverty groups to the debates on European strategies and their implementation in Ireland, including the socio-economic plan *Europe 2020*, the *Platform Against Poverty etc.*, through the alliance of the *EAPN Ireland Policy Group on Europe 2020*.
- Resourcing the fight against poverty with information newsletters, social media and training
- Facilitating debate and policy development in our sector and with decision makers
- Leading alliances to link to European campaigns, such as the European Minimum Income Network.

Membership is open to all groups whose main aim is to fight poverty. Associate membership is open to all groups and individuals who wish to support and be part of our work.

EAPN Ireland Membership form

Name _____

Organisation _____

Address _____

E-mail _____

Full Member (€20 p.a.) _____

Associate Member (€15 p.a.) _____



Discussion in the Irish tent of the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, Brussels, 2013

Please return to EAPN Ireland, Equity House, 16 Upper Ormond Quay, Dublin 7
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