



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Will MEPs give to the ESF its full potential to reduce poverty?

Brussels, 18 November 2013 – Last week, EAPN and the 19 other NGOs running the campaign *EU Money for Poverty Reduction NOW!* sent an urgent letter to the President of the European Parliament and the Presidents of the European political groups, on the eve of the plenary vote on the EU Budget and the ESF Regulation 2014-2020. The Coalition sees this vote as a test of the European Parliament's commitment to reducing poverty by supporting a strong European Social Fund of at least 25% of the Cohesion Budget to back the 20% earmarked for poverty reduction. This would make a real difference for the 120 million women and men currently facing poverty and social inclusion across the European Union and would help to increase people's trust in the European Parliament in these times of crisis.

"We are grateful for the constant support of the European Parliament in defending the European Commission's proposal to have a minimum share of 20% of the European Social Fund (ESF) budget earmarked for social inclusion and poverty reduction. We now expect them to renew that commitment and vote for a strong European Social Fund, of at least 25% of the Cohesion Policy Budget" said Sergio Aires, President of EAPN.

"This 25% share of ESF is essential if we are to make a real impact on poverty and social exclusion. It is also a minimum considering the devastating impact of the market-driven austerity measures. The damage needs to stop!" he added.

In their letter to the President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz and to the President of the European political groups, the Coalition for *EU Money for Poverty Reduction NOW!* Campaign recalls how crucial this vote is. In the context of a very disappointing shortfall in the national poverty-reduction targets, the rising number of people experiencing/ or at risk of poverty and social exclusion (i.e. 120 million people, 1 in 4 adults and over 1 in 4 children in the EU), the European Social Fund is more than ever needed to invest in people particularly those who are furthest from the labour market and face challenges in participating fully in society.

Earmarking 20% of the ESF for social inclusion/poverty reduction will not be ambitious enough nor sufficiently people-focused if it is not accompanied with a strong ESF budget, of at least 25% of the total Cohesion Policy's budget, supported both by the European Commission and the Employment Committee of the European Parliament. This would allow the 20% ESF earmarked combined with the ex-ante conditionality on poverty and social inclusion (i.e. the draft General regulation of Structural Funds requires Member States to set up "national anti-poverty strategic policy frameworks") to provide a powerful leverage effect to set up ambitious and integrated national anti-poverty strategies, particularly if backed by a common EU antipoverty strategy.

At the eve of the European Parliamentary elections and in the context of growing skepticism of European citizens towards the European Union, the European Parliament has a vital opportunity to renew its support to women, men in committing to reduce poverty and social exclusion and to make a real difference to their lives.