

TOOLKIT ON ENGAGING with **europe 2020** and the **european Semester**

COUNTRY REPORTS,
COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS,
NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMMES AND
NATIONAL SOCIAL REPORTS 2015

Introduction

In 2010, the **Europe 2020 Strategy** broke new ground, by establishing five concrete targets for delivering on smart, social, and sustainable growth (see more information below). This process is implemented annually through a cycle called the **European Semester**, the main instrument for economic coordination between the policies of Member States and for achieving common objectives on Europe 2020. The Mid-Term Review of Europe 2020, due to take place in 2015, has now been delayed until 2016, but it is likely to underline the importance of the Strategy and its targets, calling for strengthened ownership and participation from stakeholders. In the meantime, the European Semester continues to operate as before, with a few small, but important, changes (see below).

There is therefore a strong case to be made for **the need to urgently and actively engage with these processes**, to ensure that people and planet are put before profit, and that we are moving towards a social and sustainable Europe. Here are the main reasons why:

1. The Strategy and the implementation cycle are the dominant EU policy process for delivering on the EU's economic, employment and social priorities and could provide a **development framework for the European Union and its Member States**, setting out a vision for the future of Europe and for a sustainable exit from the crisis.
2. **Europe 2020 objectives are direct drivers for EU funding opportunities**, most significantly Structural Funds, which are explicitly linked to the targets, hence it brings clear benefits to national organisations who engage.
3. The Strategy includes **key targets to reduce poverty**, increase employment and tackle educational exclusions, **but progress has been limited**, as even more people are now in poverty, the employment rate has declined, and what has been achieved on reducing early school-leaving is largely insufficient.
4. **Stakeholders, including civil society, are supposed to be key partners in the delivery at national and EU level**. However, their involvement remains so far very marginal, with limited engagement and minimal impact on the policy proposals, and few new opportunities for engagement and structural dialogue put forward by the European Commission, or by national Governments.

The added value of getting involved with Europe 2020 and the European Semester process is clear: it is the dominant EU strategy, encompassing economic, social and environmental policies, and enforced by Member States and the EU. The challenge is to press for better and more effective governance and engagement processes.

This Toolkit is designed to help EAPN members engage during 2015 with the European Semester delivering on Europe 2020, and in particular with Country Reports, Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs), and the preparation of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and the National Social Reports (NSRs). It supports the delivery of EAPN's Europe 2020 advocacy strategy, and it aims at providing you with brief, to-the-point information about the processes and the opportunities for engagement, by clarifying the key elements, timeline, and strategic actors of the new process, as well as giving links and suggesting different ways of involvement. We also give some tips for engaging in the new round, building on members' experiences from the past years, and previous such Toolkits drafted with members. If any of the terms used in this Toolkit are not clear, please refer to the [Glossary](#) on the EAPN website. For any other query, please contact the [Secretariat](#).

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What is Europe 2020? What is the European Semester?

[Europe 2020](#) is a 10-year strategy, proposed by the European Commission on 3 March 2010, aimed at "smart, sustainable, inclusive growth". It takes over from the Lisbon Strategy (which covered the period 2000–2010). It was due to be reviewed in 2015 (Mid-Term Review), currently postponed until early 2016. The Strategy identifies [five headline targets](#):

- To raise the employment rate of the population aged 20–64 from the current 69% to at least 75%.
- To achieve the target of investing 3% of GDP in R&D in particular by improving the conditions for R&D investment by the private sector, and develop a new indicator to track innovation.
- To reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels or by 30% if the conditions are right, increase the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption to 20%, and achieve a 20% increase in energy efficiency.
- To reduce the share of early school leavers to 10% from the current 15% and increase the share of the population aged 30–34 having completed tertiary from 31% to at least 40%.
- **To reduce the number of Europeans living below national poverty lines by lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion.**

However, as the European Commission recognizes¹, progress has been extremely limited:

- 5 million more people are now in poverty (121.6 million), a shortfall of 25 million (in 2013).
- The employment rate has declined to 68.4% (2013), leaving a shortfall of nearly 7%.
- Early school leaving has reduced to 12.0% (2013), leaving a shortfall of 2%.
- There has been a 17.9% reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2012, but national projections show 13 Member States will not achieve their national targets by 2020.

Monitoring progress and ensuring the active involvement of Member States are key elements of the Strategy. This is done through the [European Semester](#), an annual cycle of macro-economic, budgetary and structural policy coordination. This is done through 3 (supposedly reinforcing) pillars: *thematic* coordination (around the Europe 2020 targets in areas like employment, social inclusion, education), *macroeconomic* surveillance and *fiscal* surveillance under the Stability and Growth Pact. The Europe 2020 Strategy is supported by [7 EU Flagship Initiatives](#), aimed at catalysing thematic progress. A Mid-Term Review process of the Strategy started in 2014.

A few changes were already introduced in 2015, before the results of the Mid-Term Review public consultation being fully taken on board. One of these changes is to the Integrated Guidelines for economic and employment policy, which underpin the delivery of the Strategy and its targets. In previous years, Country-Specific Recommendations were accompanied by a comprehensive document, analysing the social and economic situation in each Member State, and underpinning the Recommendations. From 2015 onwards, these documents, now called Country Reports, are released in February each year, to better inform the design of National Reform Programmes. These changes, as well as other standing elements of the European Semester process, are explained in detail below.

¹ Eurostat, *Smarter, Greener, More Inclusive? Indicators to support the Europe 2020 Strategy*, 2015 edition ([here](#)).

Main documents of the European Semester:

WHEN?	EUROPE 2020 (thematic surveillance)	STABILITY AND GROWTH PACT & MACROECONOMIC IMBALANCES PROCEDURE (macroeconomic & fiscal surveillance)
November	Annual Growth Survey (EC)	
		Alert Mechanism Report (EC)
February / March	Country Reports (EC)	
April	National Reform Programmes (MS)	Stability / Convergence Reports (MS)
June/July	Country Specific Recommendations (EC)	
October		Eurozone budget appraisal (EC)

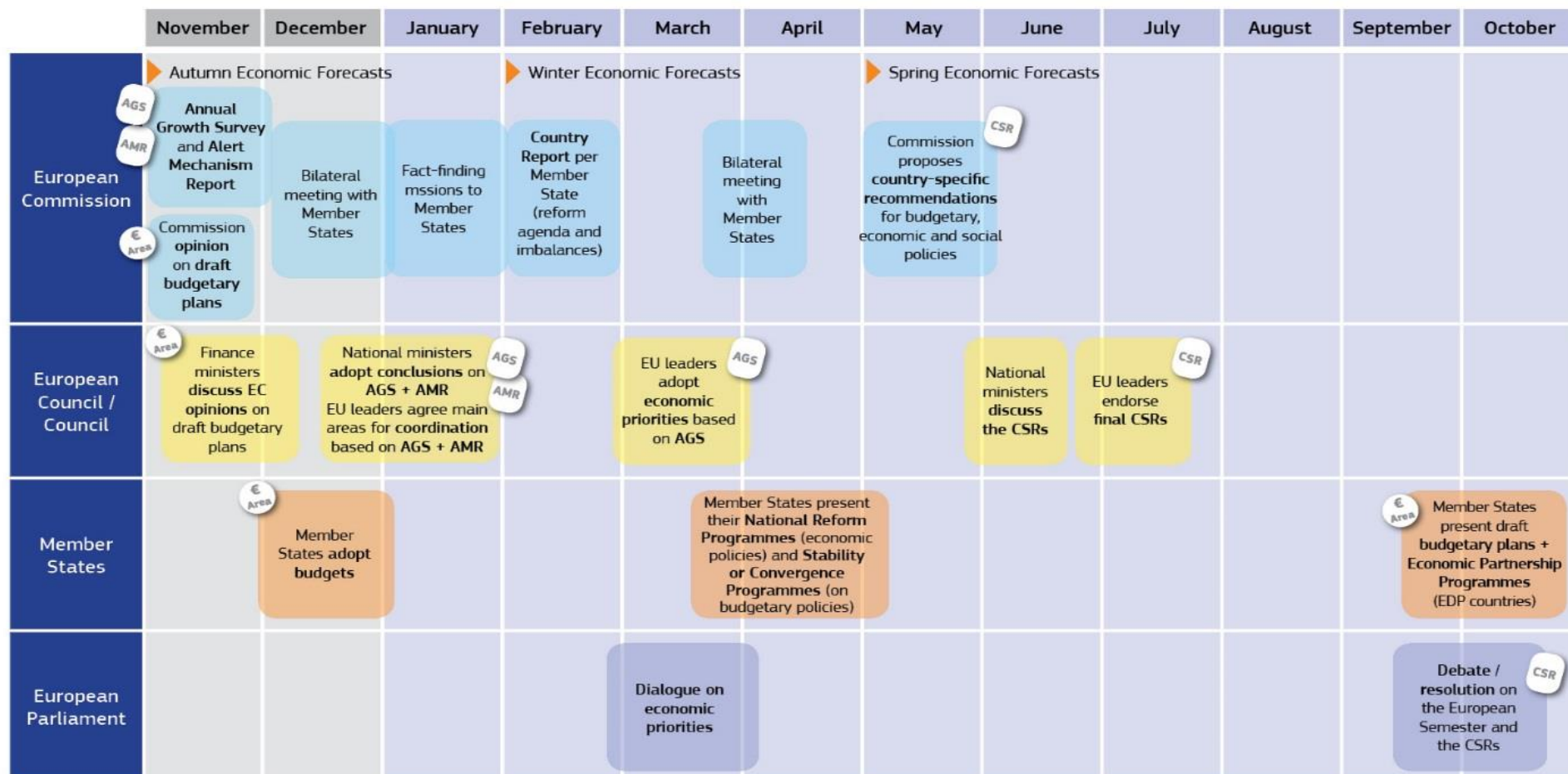
The key stages in the European semester are as follows:

- **In November**, the Commission issues its [Annual Growth Survey](#), which sets out EU priorities for the coming year to boost growth and job creation.
- **In December**, the Commission holds bilateral meetings with national Governments on these priorities and what they mean for each country.
- **In February**, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament discuss the Annual Growth Survey. The European Commission issues the [Country Reports](#), assessing progress on the EU priorities and the CSR implementation and highlighting key areas of intervention for each Member State.
- **In March**, EU Heads of State and Government (i.e. the European Council) issue EU guidance for national policies on the basis of the Annual Growth Survey, at the Spring Council. Another round of bilateral meetings with Member States takes place at the national level.
- **In mid-April**, Member States submit their Stability / Convergence Programmes (SCP) for 'sound public finances', as well as [National Reform Programmes \(NRP\)](#), which detail how targets will be reached, what national policies will be implemented, and how the EU guidance has been taken into account from the Country Reports and CSRs (see below for more). Member States submit their [National Social Reports](#) (full, or questionnaire answers, depending on the year) in the same time.
- **In May**, the Commission proposes [Country-Specific Recommendations](#) based on the Country Reports and the submitted National Reform Programmes.
- **In June**, national Governments discuss the proposed Recommendations also in Council formations (EPSCO and others), as well as in advisory bodies (Social Protection Committee, Employment Committee), before the European Council discusses and endorses the recommendations.
- **In July**, the ECFIN Council formally adopts the Country-Specific Recommendations.
- **In the Autumn**, the Eurozone Governments present the draft budgets to the European Commission.

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EUROPEAN SEMESTER: A PARTNERSHIP EU-MEMBER STATES



Glossary: **AGS**: Annual Growth Survey – **AMR**: Alert Mechanism Report – **CSR**: Country-Specific Recommendations

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Key Instruments – Country Reports, NRPs, CSRs, NSRs

Country Reports

Between 2010 and 2014, Country-Specific Recommendations for each country were accompanied by a Staff Working Document at the end of May, which included a more detailed analysis of the challenges faces by that particular country, as well as policy suggestions for tackling these. The document underpinned the CSRs and provided assessments also for areas not picked up by the Recommendations themselves – which were said to only pick up on the most salient challenges.

From 2015, the system has changed, and a new approach proposed by the new European Commission, which now issues [Country Reports](#) in February, containing the detailed national analysis previously included in the Staff Working Document which used to accompany the CSR. These Country Reports assess the progress of each Member State in addressing the issues identified in the previous CSRs, including an in-depth review under the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure. For Member States with a macro-economic adjustment programme, the Report discusses progress with the implementation of reforms. Individual Country Reports were presented this year on February 26th for 27 Member States, while the one for Greece will follow at a later date. They were accompanied by an overarching [Communication](#). The new model, with releasing these Reports in February, aims at them providing the basis for dialogue with Member States in bilateral meetings and feeding into the preparation of National Reform Programmes (as well as Stability / Convergence Programmes), to be submitted by Member States in mid-April. They also provide a potentially key moment for stakeholder engagement.

National Reform Programmes (NRPs)

National Reform Programmes are the yearly reports prepared by the Member States, demonstrating how they are implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy (past and future actions), the priorities of the Annual Growth Survey, and the Country Specific Recommendations. They are presented together with the Stability / Convergence Programmes, which detail progress on fiscal stability, and with the National Social reports (see below). They should describe their implementation of 5 overarching EU targets to be reached by 2020 (see above), translated into national targets by each Member State. Key for EAPN are the poverty target – to achieve a reduction in poverty and social exclusion of at least 20 million people, implemented through 3 indicators (at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation, and low work intensity), the target to reach 75% employment rate, and the one aimed at reducing school drop out to below 10% and improving completion rate for tertiary education. The achievement of these targets should be based on 8 Integrated Guidelines (see below and in the next chapter).

The National Reform Programme should focus on the key priorities of the yearly [Annual Growth Survey \(2015\)](#) and the Integrated Guidelines, but increasingly the main requirement is to show how the Commission's [Country-Specific Recommendations 2014](#) are being delivered, and to respond to the Commission's assessment of the implementation of the CSRs, done through the [Country Reports](#). Measures described in the NRPs should be correlated to the national targets, and should be concrete, reflect urgency and detail budgetary consequences. Each year's NRP should build on the previous, and give emphasis to implementation of the CSRs.

The structure of the NRP is set out in a [Guidance Note](#), released by the European Commission in October 2013, but not publically available. The document clarifies that the NRPs should strike the right balance between reporting on progress made and setting out new policy proposals. The Guidance Note details the structure of the NRP:

1. Introduction (1-2 pages)
2. Macroeconomic context and scenario (2-3 pages)
3. Implementation of Country-Specific Recommendations (1-2 page for each recommendation)
4. Progress towards national Europe 2020 targets (5 pages)
5. Additional reform measures and the use of Structural Funds (as necessary)
6. Institutional issues and stakeholder involvement (2 pages).

The Guidance Note also contains a very useful [Annex](#), which details, step by step, the timeline of the European Semester (see also graph above, and timeline at the end of this chapter).

Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)

The [Country Specific Recommendations](#) are policy recommendations made by the Commission for each country within the European Semester, based on a review of each Member State's economic and social performance in the previous year, and on how far they are delivering on the EU-wide priorities set out in the Annual Growth Survey. The recommendations are concrete, targeted and measurable, and concentrate on what can realistically be achieved in the next 12-18 months. As countries face different challenges, the recommendations tailor the Annual Growth Survey priorities to the situation in each Member State. The CSRs are drafted by the European Commission, after a thorough assessment of progress since the previous year's CSRs, and a detailed analysis of the National Reform Programmes and Stability / Convergence Programmes, submitted by Member States in April.

The CSRs are debated in the Council formations (eg EPC, EMCO and SPC), before being discussed and endorsed by Heads of State or Government at the European Council in June. The final adoption of the CSRs in July concludes the European Semester. The work is then handed over the Member States for the national semester for implementation. So far, the CSRs were accompanied by a Staff Working Document for each country, detailing the situation in that particular Member States and noting trends, both thematic, as well as macroeconomic/fiscal. As from 2015, this document, under the name of Country Report, will be released in February each year, so that it can feed into the NRPs that Member States submit each April (see above).

As indicated, the NRP Guidance Note prioritises the monitoring of the implementation of CSRs in the Reports, and includes an Annex specifically designed to facilitate this analysis. You can consult the reporting tables listed in Annex II of the NRP Guidance Note [here](#).

National Social Reports (NSRs)

The National Social Reports are not officially part of the European Semester or Europe 2020, but they are supposed to play a crucial link role between Europe 2020 and the Social OMC, underpinning the social dimension of the NRPs in the Semester. The Social Protection Committee (SPC) members (representatives from the Social Ministries from the Member States), insisted, in their Opinion of June 2011, on the importance of the strengthening of the [Social Open Method of Coordination](#) (OMC), based on the [Common Objectives](#), and addressing access to rights, resources and services, across 3 pillars: Social Inclusion, Pensions, Health and Long-term Care. Progress is monitored through [Common Social Indicators](#), which have now been incorporated into the [Social Protection Performance Monitor](#). Then mutual learning is promoted through internal SPC [Peer Reviews](#), and external ones, involving other stakeholders, as well as studies and reports, including by the Independent Experts, who review national performance and report to the Commission.

National Social Reports (NSRs) are prepared to chart how the Common Objectives are being delivered at national level, and to highlight new trends and concerns. They also provide the basis for the SPC's report to the October EPSCO, which underpins the social priorities in the context of the Annual Growth Survey and the Joint Employment Report and assesses the implementation and impact of policy reforms in the field of social protections, health and long-term care. The Structure of the National Social Reports is also set out in a [Guidance Note](#), dispatched to National Governments in February 2015. Every two years, full National Social Reports are submitted (the last one in 2014), while in the years in between (such as 2015) Member States are required to do light reporting by filling in a questionnaire, submitted in the same time as the National Reform Programmes. As reporting takes place annually, only new developments (ie, over the past year) should be reported.

The Guidance Note does not contain any reference to excluding countries receiving emergency external financial assistance - which can be construed as the NSRs being equally developed for all 28 Member States. The structure of the NSR is equally outlined in the Guidance Note (see full details by clicking on the link above):

1. Overview (1/2p maximum)
2. Delivering on Europe 2020 poverty and social exclusion target (1/2p maximum)
3. Policy reforms for the period 2014-2015 (5p maximum)
 - 3.1 Recent reforms and policy initiatives in social inclusion
 - 3.2 Recent reforms to achieve adequate and sustainable pensions
 - 3.3 Recent reforms in health care policy
 - 3.4 Recent reforms to achieve adequate social protection for long-term care needs

Other elements

Mid-Term Review

The Mid-Term Review of the Europe 2020 Strategy is a process to be carried out initially in 2014-2015, five years after the adoption of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and five years before its completion. However, the final outcome of the review has been postponed until early 2016. It looks at the current state of play of progress on the targets, as well as at the functioning of the Strategy and its coordination process, the European Semester. The European Commission put forward, in early 2014, a [stock-taking communication](#), assessing the status quo and laying the grounds for a public consultation (May – October 2014).

On 3rd March 2015, the European Commission adopted a [Communication](#) summarising the results of the public consultation. The document indicates that 755 responses from 29 countries were received, with social partners, interest groups and non-governmental organisations being the most represented category of respondents (41%).

The main outcomes of the consultations, as interpreted by the Commission, were:

- Europe 2020 is seen as a relevant overarching framework, and its objectives and priorities are meaningful in the light of current and future challenges.
- The five headline targets represent key catalysts for jobs and growth.
- Most of the flagship initiatives have served their purpose, but have weak visibility.
- There is a need to improve the delivery of the strategy through enhanced ownership and cooperation.

For more information on the content of this Communication, see the next chapter. You can also consult EAPN's [position paper](#) and [response](#) to the public consultation. Next steps of the process include that the European Commission will present proposals for the review of the Europe 2020 Strategy early in 2016.

Integrated Guidelines

The Integrated Guidelines (as mandated by the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union) frame Member States' efforts to coordinate actions in the field of economic policy and employment. These Guidelines underpin the delivery of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and provide the basis for Country-Specific Recommendations. While constituting a package, the Guidelines are of two types: economic, and employment, with a different Treaty base and impact

The Guidelines were [first adopted in 2010](#), when it was decided that they would remain largely stable till 2014. On March 3rd 2015, the European Commission adopted a new proposal for [Integrated Guidelines](#), which will now be debated by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. The new Guidelines (now only 8 as compared to the previous 10) are supposed to better reflect the priorities and political direction of the new Juncker Commission. For more information on the content of the Guidelines, see the next chapter.

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Indicative Timeline and Checklist for EAPN members

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Europe 2020 / National Reform Programmes</i>	<i>Social OMC / National Social Reports</i>	<i>EAPN Action National level</i>
November 2014 – February 2015	28 November - The European Commission issued its Annual Growth Survey (AGS), which sets out EU priorities for next year.	The SPC releases its annual report on social protection systems.	Contact key interlocutors (SPC member, Independent Expert, European Semester Officer, contacts in your Governments, country desk officers in DG Employment) to find out more information about the process, the timing, and which are the best opportunities for input.
February 2015	• The Council formations – EPSCO, ECOFIN and the EP discuss the AGS. • 26 February – The Commission issues Country Reports.		Working together on Country Specific Recommendations: analysis, how far they have been implemented, positive and negative impact, new policy development, alternative recommendations prepared. • 6th & 7th February in Rome, Italy: EU ISG meeting + template to return to the Secretariat. Members follow up on their proposals with governments, Commission and the European Semester Officers.
March 2015	19-20 March - European Spring Council issues guidance for national policies, on the basis of the AGS.		• Review the Country Report and use it to articulate your proposals for the upcoming NRP (and NSR) • Continue to press for a stakeholder process on the Country Reports, NRP and NSR, and for your engagement with your Government, including sending any responses to drafts; use media, social media, and other channels to put forward your proposals.

April 2015	15th April - Member States submit their National Reform Programmes.	Member States submit the National Social Reports or Questionnaire (the latter in 2015).	Get hold of your NRP and NSR Questionnaire and review them together with your Network or Organisation, checking them against your inputs; issue a Press Release, and send your comments to your Government, the European Commission, and other key interlocutors.
May 2015	The European Commission assesses the NRPs and adopts the CSRs		Shared analysis of the NRPs and NSRs. Questionnaire and Synthesis Report Format to be agreed.
June 2015	The Council formations discuss the CSRs. The European Council endorses them (26-27 June).		Shared analysis of the NRPs and NSRs. Questionnaire and Synthesis Report Format to be agreed.
July 2015	The Economic and Financial Council adopts the CSRs.		Joint work on the CSRs, NRPs and NSRs at the EU ISG meeting on July 2nd in Bilbao, Spain.
September 2015	National Semester: Member States present their budget draft to their Parliaments and implement their NRPs and the CSRs.		Disseminate the EAPN synthesis report and your own inputs/reactions to your Government, the SPC representative, the Independent Expert, the European Semester Officer, the country desk officer in DG Employment, the media, and other stakeholders.
October 2015	15th October - Member States in the Euro area present their national budgets to the European Commission.		9-10 October – Joint work on the European Semester in the framework of the EU ISG meeting in Brussels. EAPN Policy Conference on the main findings and messages.
September - December 2015			Review your engagement and consider next steps – including more pro-active inputs. Attempt to get engaged with the bilateral meetings and fact-finding missions organized by the Commission in preparation for their Country Report assessments.

Recent EU Policy Hooks

In formulating your positions, you might find it useful to refer to the following “policy hooks”, put together from recent European-level documents. For a complete list of useful quotes from the same documents regarding stakeholder engagement, please see the Annex.

[Annual Growth Survey \(AGS\)](#)

As indicated in the first section of this Toolkit, the AGS is the document that launches the European Semester, by setting out the broad EU economic priorities for the year to come. It is the first step in the annual cycle. The Annual Growth Survey 2015, adopted on November 28th 2014, is modelled after the new Commission President J. C. Juncker’s proposals of ‘Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change’. The EAPN Secretariat posted a [Press Release](#) following the launch, sent a [letter to the EPSCO Council](#), and prepared a [short response](#), which highlights positive areas that may be useful to quote, as well as missed opportunities and key Recommendations (AGS & JER).

The AGS is organised around 3 main priorities:

- 1) A coordinated boost to investment
- 2) A renewed commitment to structural reforms
- 3) Pursuing fiscal responsibility

Within these priorities, Europe 2020, the social dimension, and in particular the poverty target, seem completely invisible. Priority 4 (*Tackle Unemployment and the Social Consequences of the Crisis*), present in previous AGSs, has been abandoned. Some positive references include:

- Commitment to investment and to stimulate the creation of more and better jobs.
- More flexibility allowed on austerity measures, encouraging more demand-side measures where progress on the deficit is made.
- Priority given to long-term unemployment and youth
- Call to preserve the adequacy of pension systems to ensure a decent level of income
- Recognition of the need for adequate social protection systems, at all stages of a person’s life, complemented by affordable quality childcare and education, prevention of early school leaving, housing supporting and accessible health care.
- Recognition that welfare systems should play their role to combat poverty and foster social inclusion.
- Call to broaden tax bases, enhance transparency and improve tax compliance to tackle evasion and avoidance as well as to take account of distributional impact.
- Commitment to monitor social progress and impact of reforms over time, introducing the employment and social indicators into the macroeconomic imbalances.

[Joint Employment Report \(JER\)](#)

The Joint Employment Report forms an Annex of the AGS and reviews national policies meant to reach the employment, education, and poverty-reduction targets of Europe 2020, as presented in the National Reform Programmes, and based on the Integrated Guidelines. The Joint Employment Report continues to constitute, mainly, a stock taking exercise, listing country statistics and policy measures without complementing them with an in-depth qualitative analysis. While divergence within the European Union is often noted, no attempt is made to link policy efforts in a particular country to its statistical performance. Results are judged from a purely numerical perspective, and no policy guidance is offered.

Just like its previous edition, the Report is structured around three main chapters:

1. Labour market and social trends in the EU
2. Implementing the Employment Guidelines
3. Scoreboard of key employment and social indicators.

Positive references in the document include:

- Some attention is paid to quality work and employment, with decent jobs being mentioned a few times. There is recognition that wage increased could support wobbly aggregate demand, that part-time work can be involuntary, and that minimum wage increases are positive, as well as the fight against in-work poverty.
- Inequality is mentioned and measures, with the explicit recognition that wage polarisation, labour market segmentation, less redistributive tax and benefit systems, and fiscal consolidation are key causes.
- The report clearly acknowledge the negative impact of the high and rising tax wedge, particularly on low-income earners, and underlines that regressive taxation has severely hit the most vulnerable, and that social expenditure has started a downward trend since 2010, despite no signs of recovery. The Social Scoreboard analysis identifies the weakening of social assistance, cuts in public sector wages, and regressive taxation as the main causes for the decline in household disposable incomes.
- Regarding health and education, the document highlights the growing unmet health needs, as well as attempts to reverse the negative trend of massive cuts to education – although the latter is tackled mainly from a “labour market skills needs” perspective.
- Some vulnerable groups are given prominence in the Report, such as child and elderly poverty, the situation of young people, that of the long-term unemployed, and of single parents. Other groups, such as migrants, minorities, or people with disabilities, as well as those facing multiple obstacles and discrimination, are mentioned in passing or not at all.
- Gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the text, with most statistics broken down by gender, and a specific chapter tackling gender inequality on the labour market, the gender pay & pension gap, childcare availability (including progress on Barcelona targets) and reconciliation measures, as well as gender stereotypes.

[A New Start for Europe: Juncker’s Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change](#)

On July 15th, 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker unveiled his Political Guidelines for the next European Commission. The introduction highlights growing unemployment levels, increased lack of trust in the European project, and “a lack of social fairness”. His 10 priorities are as follows, the most important one for EAPN being Priority 5, where some references are made to social objectives:

1. A New Boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment
2. A Connected Digital Single Market
3. A Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy
4. A Deeper and Fairer Internal Market with a Strengthened Industrial Base
5. A Deeper and Fairer Economic and Monetary Union
6. A Reasonable and Balanced Free Trade Agreement with the U.S.
7. An Area of Justice and Fundamental Rights Based on Mutual Trust
8. Towards a New Policy on Migration
9. A Stronger Global Actor
10. A Union of Democratic Change

While the overall message of the document is very competitiveness- and growth-focussed, with an emphasis on investment, fiscal sustainability and macroeconomic priorities, with no concrete social objective, reference to Europe 2020 or to the poverty target, there are some positive hooks in the text, summarised below. You can also access EAPN's [press release](#) on the occasion.

- Supporting young people into decent jobs, through the Youth Guarantee.
- Strict implementation of the Posting of Workers Directive, to ensure that social dumping does not take place anywhere in the EU.
- Combat tax evasion, tax fraud and money laundering, and support for the Financial Transaction Tax.
- A commitment to always keep Europe's social dimension in mind within the context of deepening the Economic and Monetary Union. The stability of our single currency and the solidity of public finances are as important to me as social fairness in implementing necessary structural reforms.
- A promise to replace "Troika"-type arrangements in the future with "a more democratically legitimate and more accountable structure, based around European institutions with enhanced parliamentary control both at European and at national level."
- A proposal that any future support and reform programme "goes not only through a fiscal sustainability assessment, but through a social impact assessment as well, as the social effects of structural reforms need to be discussed in public."
- A statement that "It is not compatible with the social market economy that during a crisis, ship-owners and speculators become even richer, while pensioners can no longer support themselves."
- A promise that negotiations for the current Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) will not "not sacrifice Europe's safety, health, social and data protection standards or our cultural diversity on the altar of free trade", as well as a commitment to more transparency.
- A commitment to fight discrimination on all grounds, as well as organised crime, and human trafficking, and to guarantee fundamental rights and values.
- A commitment to avoid humanitarian catastrophes such as the Lampedusa situation and set in place clear and accessible asylum rules, complemented by a new European policy on legal migration, featuring a "Blue Card" system.

European Commission's Investment Plan for Europe

Also known as the "Juncker Investment Plan", the document was presented in November 2014 and is an ambitious infrastructure investment programme, aimed at unlocking public and private investments in the "real economy" of at least € 315 bn over a three years fiscal period (2015 – 2017). The document contains no useful reference, as it does not touch upon the social situation, poverty or employment, nor on social investment, focussing strictly on large infrastructure, based on leverage of mainly private investment projects. There is only one reference to guaranteeing "social and environmental sustainability" when removing obstacles to growth.

Communication accompanying the Country Reports

As explained above, the new Country Reports were accompanied by an overarching communication, entitled "Assessment of growth challenges, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth review". While mainly focussing on the macroeconomic and fiscal performance of Member States, there are nonetheless some positive references, such as the recognition that there is a rise in poverty and negative social developments, and a commitment to a stronger focus on social fairness and the social dimension and reforms, to build sustained growth and greater social cohesion.

Section 3.2., *Accelerating structural reforms*, contains a number of positive elements, such as acknowledgement of the impact of the crisis, support to job creation and broad social security provision, to tackle social exclusion and rising poverty levels. It also speaks about reducing the tax wedge, particularly for low-income groups, and addressing segmentation on the labour market, by promoting more stable open-ended employment, notably for the young. The section also mentions stepping up the fight against corruption, tax evasion and undeclared work.

New Integrated Guidelines

You can consult the [Old Guidelines](#) (2010-2014) and compare them with the content of the [New Guidelines](#) (2015-). The most important one for EAPN is the previous Guideline 10, currently Guideline 8 – *Ensuring fairness, combatting poverty and promoting equal opportunities*. There are two parts: the economic guidelines (1-4), accompanied by a [Council Recommendation](#), and the employment guidelines (5-8), accompanied by a [Council Decision](#)². The first document includes an important point (4) about the social impact of the crisis and building cohesive societies, speaking explicitly about equal access to opportunities and combatting poverty, as well as tackling inequalities and promoting access to the labour market and to social participation. The second document contains the exact same paragraph, but numbered (7), and an additional paragraph (2), about the EU's duty to fight social exclusion and discrimination, by promoting social justice and guaranteeing adequate social protection.

Youth Employment Initiative

The Youth Employment Initiative was proposed by the 7-8 February 2013 European Council, with a budget of €6 billion for the period 2014-20, in order to particularly support young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in the Union's regions with a youth unemployment rate in 2012 at above 25%, by integrating them into the labour market. The Commission pre-finances only 1% of proposed activities by Member States, and subsequently reimburses national Governments, who have to advance the other 99% of the cost.

However, due to strict fiscal and budgetary discipline imposed in the EU, most Member States were unable to front sufficient funds. Subsequently, the European Commission proposed, in February 2015, to make an additional 1 billion euro available to Member States, thus raising pre-financing to 30%. The proposal means that Member States benefiting from the initiative could receive a third of the €3.2 billion allocation immediately after the adoption of the Operational Programmes. Member States are expected to make the funding available immediately to project beneficiaries, through advance payments for projects, which will be closely monitored by the Commission. The Commission estimates that accelerated pre-financing could speed up immediate support and reach out to between 350,000 and 650,000 young people this year. At the current pre-financing rate of 1%, in contrast, this figure would be between 14,000 and 22,000 young people. This represents a significant policy driver for stepped-up youth interventions, particularly through the Operational Programmes.

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² These documents (the *Council Recommendation on broad guidelines for economic policies of Member States and the EU*, and the *Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of Member States and the EU*) are still in draft form, and they constitute European Commission proposals – pending the approval and endorsement of the Council of the European Union.

General Tips for Engaging in the European Semester/Europe 2020 at the national level

In addition to the tips provided in this section, members are invited to consult EAPN's publication [Giving a Voice to Citizens – Building stakeholder engagement for effective decision making](#) (2014), launched at the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty in Brussels. It provides common principles, concrete tools and tips to help policy makers take the important step of putting effective stakeholder dialogue into practice, drawing on concrete inspiring practice – at the EU, national and subnational levels. See below for more tips on how to engage.

1. Identify who is responsible for the European Semester in your country and at the EU level

Based on previous years' experience, and according to our members' input, it is often the Economy or Finance Ministry, or Prime Minister's Office, who drafts the NRPs, with more or less (depending on the country) input from other Ministries, such as Employment and Social Affairs, Environment etc. In each delegation of the European Commission's representation in your country, a European Semester Officer is charged with ensuring the link on all European Semester matters. Equally, the Directorate General for Employment in the European Commission in Brussels has dedicated country desks working on Europe 2020, as well as on Structural Funds. These players are important both as sources of information, as well as key targets for your lobbying, so it is key to establish contact. Regarding the National Social Reports, they should be prepared by the Social Affairs Ministries, as with the previous National Strategic Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. In order to be sure, the easiest way is to get in touch with your Social Protection Committee member. Find all relevant information in the [Who to Contact?](#) section below (click on the link for quick access).

2. Ask to be invited to participate in the stakeholder engagement

Write or e-mail the relevant contacts now (early 2015) and ask what process will be developed to involve stakeholders in the discussions on the Country Reports, the NRP and NSR and CSRs this year. Ask to be invited as one of the stakeholders representing anti-poverty organisations and working with people experiencing poverty. You should ask what form this engagement will take and whether you will be able to comment on a draft, or can send a separate contribution. You should insist on your Government's responsibility to ensure a meaningful, timely, and structured process of consultation and involvement. You will find useful the references supporting stakeholder involvement in European documents – please see the [Annex](#) at the end of this document (click on the link for quick access). EAPN's overall aim is not to be only involved in one-off consultations, but to build strong regular dialogue platforms – eg national platforms against poverty, where stakeholders regularly meet with Government representative to discuss progress on poverty reduction, and propose new actions. These should provide input to the Europe 2020 Strategy process, but not be limited only to it. See examples of [Good Practices](#) in the chapter below (click on the link for quick access).

3. Brief members and build a common position

If you are going to be able to make a submission or contribution, it is important to stimulate debate with other members of your Network or Organisation, and to develop together a common position. This brings a lot of added value to any response you might want to make, and engages the Network / Organisation in the work. Some members strive to include the direct participation of people experiencing poverty, which is a good practice that EAPN fully encourages. This means briefing them, using this Toolkit and the other examples, and analysing together your national context. Organizing capacity building sessions can be very useful. You should start by analysing the current social situation in your country, the key trends, and the impact of policy decisions and the EU policy recommendations on people experiencing poverty, building consensus on the main policy changes you think are necessary.

4. Making your input: Developing key messages

Starting from the analysis and common position above, members should clarify the key weaknesses of your country's draft NRP / NSR against your list of what you consider key requirements. Given the short timeframe, you might not be provided with a document you can comment on, but only have the opportunity to provide written or oral input without seeing a draft text. Be prepared to send at short notice the key messages that you want to put forward, based on your analysis of the main trends. Sometimes, a few crucial points make more of an impact than a long list of demands. If you are able to see a draft, you will often have a very short time to respond. Having prepared your key messages beforehand will help you to be able to provide quick, but effective input within the tight deadlines. In preparing your position, look at your country's last year's [National Reform Programme and Country Specific Recommendations](#) and the recently released [Country Reports](#). You can also refer to the joint EAPN review of the NRPs for [2011](#), [2012](#), [2013](#) and [2014](#), as well as members' shadow Country Specific Recommendations for [2012](#), [2013](#) and [2014](#). EAPN members also contributed to the Semester Alliance (see below in point 6) reports on the 2014 [CSRs](#) and [NRPs & the European Semester](#). Another useful document is [EAPN's response to the Annual Growth Survey package](#). These may help you devise your key messages – although, in the end, each national context will be different.

5. Review your country's CSRs

In [2012](#), [2013](#) and [2014](#), EAPN members analyzed the Commission's Country-Specific Recommendations, as well as their implementation, and developed their own alternative proposals. It is clear that the CSRs are increasingly important, impacting on national policy priorities. Compare the CSRs prepared by your Network for your country to [those issued by the European Commission](#), commenting on how far the proposals are the same, and highlighting gaps, and also check the newly-released [Country Reports](#). Prepare comments on the implementation of the CSRs – negative and positive points. Propose new Country-Specific Recommendations. This work will be carried out with the support for the Secretariat, by means of a pre-dispatched questionnaire, as well as through the EU ISG meeting in February 2015. The resulting proposals will feed directly into the NRP / NSR process, at national and EU level: you should send your proposals to your Government, as part of your NRP and input to the Semester, if you establish a more regular dialogue, but also to the other key interlocutors identified in this section. Find all relevant information in the [Who to Contact?](#) section below.

6. Build alliances

Last years' experience of stakeholder involvement showed that there is still a lot to be desired in most countries. In the current negative context, it is also difficult to make progress on poverty on our own. It is important that you try to build strong alliances with other organizations that share our values and concerns – for example - with trade unions, but also with other NGOs (including environmental NGOs) or NGO platforms, academics, politicians, the media. Key interlocutors, resource and allies can be the [Independent Experts on Social Protection and Social Inclusion](#), as well as the Social Protection Committee member, the European Semester Officer, and the country desk officers, as mentioned above. It is important to send your inputs/messages and proposals of Recommendations to them, and to try to establish a more on-going dialogue with them. If possible, try to get your National Parliaments engaged, as there was little parliamentary involvement last year, and involve your MEPs. Also, think creatively to find ways to support the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs to have their say in all policy areas, and not to be squeezed out by overarching economic and financial constraints in the drafting process.

In 2014, EAPN was funded by the Commission to coordinate a cross-sectoral Alliance on Stakeholder Engagement in the European Semester, involving several EAPN members, alongside and other social and green NGOs, trade unions, and other partners. The Semester Alliance conducted joint work and advocacy to impact on the European Semester and Europe 2020, and funded 3 such pilot national alliances, in Bulgaria, Denmark, and Ireland. See more about the Alliance's work [here](#), and in the Best Practices section of this Toolkit, below.

7. Disseminating your message and promoting public debate

Given the current weakness of the stakeholder engagement process, it's important not to keep your messages internal to your dialogue with the Government. Think how best you can disseminate your messages to key actors and how to get your messages out to the public. This can mean sending letters, thinking of more attractive ways of presenting your messages and input and circulating them through different channels and groups. Working in alliances (see above) will be crucial to this. If possible, it is always useful to involve media (including social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, blogs, forums) to convey your messages more widely to the general public, and raise awareness on the process and concerns.

Please send the EAPN [Secretariat](#) a copy of anything you contribute – in whatever language.

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Suggestions for Alternative Inputs and Good Practices

Members of EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group have identified different ways of engaging in a more pro-active way with Europe 2020 and the European Semester, and more broadly with anti-poverty policy. Some good practices from our members' experiences are summarised below. For more information and support about a specific action, please contact the [Secretariat](#).

1. National Pilot Alliances under the Semester Alliance project, 2014

As mentioned above, EAPN led a project in 2014 called the "[Semester Alliance](#)" (click to access the blog with full information), aimed at building a cross-sectoral alliance among European NGOs, to work together and impact the European Semester and Europe 2020, from a social, equality, and environmental perspective. As a key part of the project, 3 national projects have been financed to pilot broad, cross-sectoral alliances to engage in the European Semester, all led by the EAPN National Networks in the respective countries – Bulgaria, Denmark, Ireland. These national alliances aimed to pilot a broad, cross-sectoral joint approach to national collaboration on Europe 2020 through the European Semester, with particular reference to joint engagement in the National Reform Programme (NRP), the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) and proposals to the Annual Growth Survey (AGS). The 3 National Networks built coalitions involving a broad range of organisations, including social, environmental/climate and/or other sectors in the 3 selected Member States, including the national members of the Brussels-based Semester Alliance. Read some of their experiences below. You can also watch a short video on the work of the Alliance, including the three national pilots, entitled [A Beating Heart for a Better Europe](#).

Bulgaria National Pilot

The national alliance is composed of 17 members, including trade unions, anti-poverty NGOs, gender organisations, among others. Many stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds have equally contributed to the Alliance activities. The main output has been the identification of important weaknesses of the European Semester processes, as well as of consequences and recommendations for improving the annual cycle of policy making and implementation. The project demonstrated that the political decision making process is vulnerable to (and prone to) distortions. It also showed that CSOs could be a very effective instrument for reduction and prevention of distortions of policy making, as they possess an impressive capacity to contribute to socially oriented and effective political decision making process. It is possible to improve in a radical way the social effectiveness of NGOs participation, by crossing the borders of the Open Method of Coordination (especially by opening the cage of "good practices") and restoring in a more intelligent way one forgotten and now forbidden practice – "naming, blaming and shaming". The pilot alliance provided evidence that this works. The most important consequence of the project was construction of basis for common activities, and this basis will not die when funding is over, as there are already concrete plans for further activities. For more information, please contact [Douhomir Minev](#) (EAPN Bulgaria) or see the [Semester Alliance blog](#).

Denmark National Pilot

It was easier than expected to gather NGOs in the national alliance, as many are frustrated and confused by the process. The Europe 2020 targets are relatively clear and measurable, but the implementation is complex and hidden in bureaucratic agendas and negotiations between officials from the Commission, the Council and Member States. Even Ministers have difficulties in following, not to say influencing, the process. Engagement and monitoring happen all year round, throughout both a European and a National semester. There are 15 NGOs in the Danish Alliance, coming from Confederations of Trade Unions, Social Housing, Women's Council, The Eco Council, Food Bank, Disability Organizations, Council for Socially Excluded, as well as social NGOs for children, the homeless etc. Our results are more awareness and learning, better contact to Ministries and Europe 2020 representatives, more effective lobbying strategies for the CSR, NRPs, AGS in the EU and in Denmark. It is important to point out that the NRP provides a flattering picture of decisions already taken, and is not affected by NGO consultation in the short run. We need longer, more strategic methods for influence. Our deliverables include:

- * A Danish Toolkit for Engaging with the European Semester and Europe 2020
- * Recommendations for a more democratic process and
- * A booklet on new strategies for growth, based on: an inclusive labour market, jobs for the poor and excluded, inclusion in social housing, gender differentiated targets and indicators, more green jobs and sustainable industries.

For more information, contact [Per K. Larsen](#) (EAPN Denmark) or see the [Semester Alliance blog](#).

Ireland National Pilot

The *Better Europe Alliance*, Irish Civil Society Organisations for a Social and Sustainable Europe, began with seven members and, by the end of 2014, had grown to twelve members. Membership includes a range of social, equality and green organisations, and the SIPTU trade union. The Alliance is coordinated by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland. The overall objective of the Alliance is to strengthen progress towards the social and environmental goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and to improve the level debate and engagement of all stakeholders in progressing the European Semester. Since it came together in April 2014, the Alliance has produced a response to the 2014 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland, a submission to the Mid-Term Review of Europe 2020, a briefing on the European Semester and the Europe 2020 Strategy. Based on these policy positions, the Alliance has secured a number of high-level meetings with European Commission officials (see below). They have also met with senior officials from the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and made two submissions to the Parliament's Joint Committee on European Union Affairs. On the 5th December 2014 the Alliance held a conference entitled 'Promoting a Socially, Economically and Environmentally Sustainable Ireland in Europe' and, as part of this, published a magazine covering a range of issues related to the European Semester and Europe 2020. Despite the ending of funding in December 2014, the Alliance members have agreed to continue to work together and, since then, have produced proposals for the 2015 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland which they presented to the Commission Fact-finding Mission to Ireland in January. The Alliance has been very positive in enabling the members to get greater access to policy makers, while also providing an opportunity to build the capacity of members to understand and engage with the European Semester and the Europe 2020 Strategy. Maintaining the Alliance has involved a lot of commitment from members. For more information, please contact [Paul Ginnell](#) (EAPN Ireland), or consult more details and all publications on www.eapn.ie and on the [Semester Alliance blog](#).

2. Attending meetings with your Government and the European Commission

Several EAPN networks have succeeded in participating in meetings with European Commission officials, whether from the EC Representation in their country, or visiting officials on fact-finding missions and bilateral meetings with the Government. Find a few positive experiences below:

EAPN Ireland

Once the Better Europe Alliance (see above) finalised its comments on the 2014 CSRs for Ireland and its proposals for the Europe 2020 Mid-Term Review, it arranged to present these to the European Commission's staff in Ireland. This meeting included the Head of the Commission Representation in Ireland and the European Semester Officer. One outcome for the meeting was the agreement for ongoing engagement. Since then, the Commission Representation and European Semester Officer have facilitated the Alliance to meet with the Director General of DG Employment and Social Affairs and Inclusion (Michel Servoz), and, in January 2015, with the Commission's fact-finding Mission to Ireland. At the same time, there is ongoing contact with what are now two European Semester Officers, including an input at the Alliance's conference in December 2014, and invitations to make relevant submissions. This ongoing relationship has proved very important to the Alliance.

For more information, please contact [Paul Ginnell](#) (EAPN Ireland).

EAPN Spain

Spain is perhaps one of the few European countries that has a national Third Sector Platform (PTS, in Spanish), which was created in 2011, and of which EAPN Spain is a member. This process required a mature and mutually confident approach on behalf of the founding organizations. The rewards were clear: a stronger presence as organized civil society, equal to other organized sectors such as the trade unions, and a powerful voice to lobbying the regional and national authorities. For two consecutive years since 2013, PTS has received an invitation to contribute to the National Reform Program from the Spanish Government, and it has now become a "stable scheme". For the 2014 NRP, PTS made concrete recommendations, based on CSRs 2013. This contribution has been acknowledged by the authorities, who explicitly mentioned those points that were covered in the NRP, and those that were not considered. They did the same with the trade unions and the employers' proposals. It is believed that PTS' lobbying had a certain weight in the Minimum Income budget substantial increase (from euro 854 million in 2013, to euro 1 billion in 2014), and other positive changes. The same process took place in the preparation of the 2014-2015, where more measures based on the 2014 CSRs were proposed, and some of them have been taken on board, such as the "Second Opportunity Act" for insolvent mortgage debtors. A (modest) fund for supporting single parent families with two children, a group that has been targeted by the PTS document as one of the poorest, has been set as well. These measures and others were presented as part of an official "Social Agenda" in February 2015, a good path for further negotiation for more social policies in the electoral year 2015.

For more information, please contact [Graciela Malgesini](#) (EAPN Spain).

EAPN Portugal

In January of 2015, EAPN Portugal received an invitation from the European Semester Officer in Portugal to participate in a meeting with the Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion Department. This meeting was developed within the “European Semester fact finding mission”, and the main aim was to exchange information in terms of poverty and social exclusion state of play. The questions focused on issues like: the factors that contributed to the increase of poverty in Portugal; the groups more vulnerable to poverty; the situation of the minimum income schemes, especially the reasons that can explain the reduction in the number of the beneficiaries of social insertion income; the profile of people receiving this income; and the monitoring of these social measures. For EAPN Portugal, this was an important moment to present the situation of poverty and social exclusion that is not visible through statistics, as well as to highlight some key alerts, such the need to improve participation of NGOs in the European Semester, the need to clear evaluate the youth employment measures since they are promoting exclusion of these groups and not a real social inclusion, and the need to monitor the implementation of the 20% of ESF to fight poverty and social exclusion. Following this meeting and, in the scope of the working group to draft a National Strategy to Fight Poverty and Social Exclusion, EAPN Portugal is requesting hearings from political parties, to know their proposals for the next elections concerning fight poverty, and to present EAPN’s own concerns and recommendations. In addition, EAPN Portugal it will develop, in May, a seminar in the National Parliament, to debate these subjects and lobby for the definition and implementation of this National Strategy to Fight Poverty and Social Exclusion.

For more information, please contact [Paula Cruz](#) (EAPN Portugal).

3. EAPN’s Call for Joint Action Projects, 2015

The EAPN Europe 2020 pilot actions are a new initiative which form part of EAPN’s 2015 work programme agreed with the European Commission under the 2015 contract. The initiative will provide financial support to 5 EAPN National Networks to conduct pilot actions to help to increase motivation for members for engaging with Europe 2020 and the European Semester, trialling new activities that could help to raise awareness, build capacity, promote better involvement and get real impact. Joint proposals, between a leading and an associated National Network, were encouraged. The remaining Networks, not involved with the 5 pilots, will be able to access small amounts of funding to support their independent engagement in the Europe 2020 and European Semester work, done with EAPN’s EU Inclusion Strategies Group (EU ISG).

The main objectives of the Europe 2020 National Pilot Actions Call are to:

- Raise awareness of Europe 2020 and the European Semester and their impact
- Build capacity of members to engage and influence more effectively Europe 2020 and the European Semester at national level, helping to provide a strong support for the development of the Network.
- Develop better national instruments to monitor the social situation and provide quality input to Europe 2020 and the Semester, with the development of a social situation report or similar as a basis for proposing recommendations.

The 5 pilot actions will be delivered between April 1st and 31st December 2015. The Steering Group of EAPN’s EU Inclusion Strategies Group has selected the 5 pilot actions as follows: Croatia & Hungary, Portugal & Bulgaria, Serbia & Macedonia, Spain & Italy, and Ireland. For more information, please get in touch with the [Secretariat](#).

4. Other good practices

At the EU ISG meeting in October 2013, in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, a series of parallel workshops were held, to map out members' good practices in engaging with Europe 2020, as well as pro-active initiatives and alternative inputs. You can access the workshop presentations:

- ⇒ Presentation by **Vito Telesca, EAPN IT**, about pro-active action at the regional level – [here](#).
- ⇒ Presentation by **Ryszard Szarfenberg, EAPN PL**, about the Social Watch in Poland – [here](#).
- ⇒ Presentation by **Robert Urbé / Caritas and EAPN LU**, about Caritas' shadow report – [here](#), and you can also consult the full report [here](#).

In previous years, **other good practices and pro-active inputs** were documented:

1. Pro-active social reports / Preventative report on the social situation

EAPN Germany produced, in 2012, their own shadow report on wealth and poverty, timed to coincide with the release of the German Poverty and Wealth Report. Reports were sold in street paper format, as well as sent to key contacts and decision-makers. The report was well taken up by the media, with 700 articles dedicated to it, and it was also well picked-up at the EU level. For the Network, it was a very useful experience on how to work together with experts and people with direct experience of poverty, and on how to engage the general public on the issues. For more information, contact [Sophie Schwab](#) (EAPN Germany).

2. Shadow NRP or NSR / Other alternative reports

EAPN France has contributed to the Opinion of the National Council for the Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion, which was attached in its entirety to the National Reform Programme. For more information contact [Jeanne Dietrich](#) (EAPN France).

EAPN Luxembourg reports that Caritas Europe, which is a member of EAPN, has developed, together with their members, an alternative shadow National Reform Programme since 2011. 23 national Caritas organisations produced a country summary, following the format of the NRP, and made contributions on recent trends, policy developments and challenges to meet the targets, in 3 core areas: employment, education and poverty reduction, with recommendations. See report [here](#). For more information contact [Robert Urbé](#) (EAPN Luxembourg).

3. Developing National Platforms Against Poverty

EAPN Belgium set up a *Europe 2002 Working Group*, which meets monthly to discuss updates from the European level and how to influence Belgian policy. The group includes some 20 people experiencing poverty. There is also a *Belgian Platform Against Poverty Europe 2020*, organised by the Public Administration of Social Integration, which meets +/- 5 times a year, and constitutes an official platform for dialogue and follow up of Belgian anti poverty policies, particularly in the framework of Europe 2020. Several NGOs take part in these meetings, including a strong delegation (10-15 members) of EAPN BE. For more information, contact [Elke Vandermeersch](#) (EAPN Belgium), and see full PowerPoint presentation [here](#).

4. Awareness raising on poverty and Europe 2020

EAPN Denmark started engaging as early as 2006, through awareness-raising projects on the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion, and conferences on poverty in Denmark. It developed a network of interested parties, and The European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2010 allowed for broadening the alliances and intensify the activities. Currently, EAPN DK represents the civil society in the Government's advisory board for the Europe 2020 Strategy, which includes 30 representatives. This board receives a draft of the NRP, as well as the CSRs as soon as they arrive, and have the chance to discuss them in detail, and have more time (2 months) for input. Criticism is taken on board. It took 5 years to build this relationship, but it was worth it. For more information, contact [Per K. Larsen](#) (EAPN Denmark), and see full PowerPoint presentation [here](#).

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Who to Contact?

Europe 2020 Specific Information

On the link below, click the name of your country on the interactive map. You can access all relevant information, including the previous National Reform Programmes, the Country Specific Recommendations, the Country Reports, the Macroeconomic Indicators, and the national targets for Europe 2020: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-your-country/index_en.htm

European Semester Officers

The Commission has deployed the so-called *European Semester Officers* in the Commission's Representations in the Member States. They are supposed to be working in partnership with stakeholders and oversee the implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations. To find a European Semester Officer in your country, please consult the [websites of the European Commission Representations](#), or access a full list with contact information [here](#).

Country Desk Officers in DG Employment

Within DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, there are country desks, with teams dedicated to policy analysis and recommendations for each country. Within these desks, there are assigned desk officers, working particularly on Europe 2020 and the European Semester for a certain country. You can access a full list with contact information [here](#).

Members of the Social Protection Committee

The [Social Protection Committee](#) (SPC) is an EU advisory policy committee for the Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in the Employment and Social Affairs Council (EPSCO). Its mandate:

- monitors social conditions in the EU and the development of social protection policies in member countries
- reports on social inclusion, health care, long-term care and pensions under the social open method of coordination
- promotes discussion and coordination of policy approaches among national governments and the Commission
- prepares Council discussions on social protection and on the country-specific recommendations in the context of the European Semester
- produces reports and opinions on its own initiative or at the request of the Council or the Commission.

[Click](#) to download list of contacts, and find your country's representative (from your national Ministry). These are your best first point of entry. You should develop an on-going relationship.

Members of the Employment Committee

The [Employment Committee](#)'s (EMCO) primary role is to advise the Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in the Employment and Social Affairs Council (EPSCO). Most of EMCO's work nowadays is centred around advising Ministers on the main products coming out of the European Semester. [Click](#) to download list of contacts. They are very useful contacts for employment policy matters, and they are supposed to be working closely with the SPC on Europe 2020.

List of European Social Policy Network members (previously Independent Experts on Social Inclusion)

The [European Social Policy Network](#) (ESPN) was established in 2014 to provide the Commission with independent information, analysis and expertise on social policies. In particular, the ESPN supports the Commission in monitoring progress towards the EU social protection and social inclusion objectives set out in the Europe 2020 strategy, including lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion, and in the European Semester. The ESPN brings together into a **single network** the work previously carried out by:

- the [European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion](#)
- the network responsible for the [Analytical Support on the Socio-Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms \(ASISP\)](#).

It also acts as the **secretariat** to the [MISSOC \(Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection\)](#). [Click](#) to download list of contacts. There are very useful allies.

All these contacts (in your Government, the European Semester Officers, the country desk officers, the SPC, EMCO, and European Social Policy Network members) are nationals from your own country, or at least people who speak the country's language and are familiar with its context – so you can address them in your own language, invite them or inform them or national events and initiatives, etc.

For more information, please contact the EAPN Secretariat:

Sian Jones, Policy Coordinator: sian.jones@eapn.eu
Amana Ferro, Senior Policy Officer: amana.ferro@eapn.eu

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Annex:

Useful References in EU Documents about Stakeholder Engagement

Europe 2020 Communication

The original Europe 2020 Strategy Communication of the European Commission underlined the importance of a partnership approach:

This partnership approach should extend to EU committees, to national parliaments and national, local and regional authorities, to social partners and to stakeholders and civil society so that everyone is involved in delivering on the vision.

and

The success of the new strategy will therefore depend critically on the European Union's institutions, Member States and regions explaining clearly why reforms are necessary – and inevitable to maintain our quality of life and secure our social models -, where Europe and its Member States want to be by 2020, and what contribution they are looking for from citizens, businesses and their representative organisation.

Finally, the European Commission calls on all parties and stakeholders (e.g. national/regional parliaments, regional and/or local authorities, social partners and civil society, and last but not least the citizens of Europe) to help implement the strategy, working in partnership, by taking action in areas within their responsibility.

Integrated Guidelines

The proposed Council Recommendation on broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and the Union, **Recital 6** clearly states:

While these guidelines are addressed to Member States and the Union, they should be implemented in partnership with all national, regional and local authorities, closely associating parliaments, as well as social partners and representatives of civil society.

The Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States contains the same text, as **Recital 9**.

The official website of the European Commission of the Europe 2020 Strategy has a [section dedicated to the role and involvement of civil society](#), acknowledging it as an important element for the drafting, implementation and assessment of the NRPs.

As indicated above, these two documents are still in draft form, and they constitute European Commission proposals – pending the approval and endorsement of the Council of the European Union later this year.

Annual Growth Survey

In **2015**, there is one explicit reference to civil society as a key stakeholder in Europe 2020:

For the EU to succeed in meeting its jobs and growth challenge, there is a need for broad consensus on the right policy direction and strong stakeholder support for reform efforts. This means that national Parliaments, the social partners and civil society at large all need to be more involved in the implementation of policies decided at EU and national levels. To associate national Parliaments more closely to the process, every year, national Parliaments and the European Parliament meet during the Parliamentary week to debate the European Semester with the involvement of the Commission.

There is another reference to stakeholders, vaguer, but nonetheless important, as it underlines the commitment to increase ownership and implementation:

An increased involvement of national Parliaments, social partners and stakeholders in the European Semester is necessary to strengthen national ownership and accountability.

Conversely through, social partners are mentioned explicitly 11 times, and given a prominent role in the process, including in what concerns social issues.

Guidance on the content and format of National Reform Programmes

The Note explicitly asks Member States to dedicate a specific section, 2 pages long, detailing how stakeholders were involved in the drafting of the NRP, including national Parliaments, social partners, civil society, regional and local authorities. The text clearly states:

Involvement and participation of all actors is essential to ensure ownership and facilitate external progress on the implementation of country-specific recommendations, objectives and targets. This section should thus explain the institutional process for the approval of the NRP as well as the involvement of the national institutional actors (national parliament, regional/local authorities, social partners / civil society).

The document equally says that:

The comments and/or contributions of social partners and other stakeholders may be summarised here and/or provided in Annex.

The Annex to the Guidance Note also contains a very encouraging paragraph:

Involvement and close association of parliaments, social partners and representatives of civil society is essential to ensure ownership and facilitate progress on the implementation of policy recommendations, objectives and targets. Low level of involvement of such actors is one factor behind increasing criticism regarding lack of democratic legitimacy of the European Semester. Member States are invited to use the opportunity of the National Reform Programme to encourage such involvement and to report on the process as regards the preparation of the NRP and in the implementation of past guidance and commitments.

Guidance for the Strategic Social Reporting 2015

There is only one reference, in the section defining the structure and content of the NSR:

How, if appropriate, social partners and other national stakeholders have been involved in the preparation of major reforms.

Communication accompanying the Country Reports

The text speaks three times about increasing or boosting ownership at all levels, but it does not spell out how, or who would be the main interlocutors. Civil society is not explicitly mentioned anywhere. One paragraph reads as follows:

The Commission is ready to engage in further dialogue at all levels in the coming weeks and months: with the Member States, the European Parliament and national Parliaments, with the social partners, and more generally with stakeholders.

Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion

Speech of Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility

By bringing a range of stakeholders from the Member States and the EU institutions together, this Convention provides a golden opportunity to discuss and come up with practical proposals on how we can best tackle the unemployment crisis and strengthen European social policies for preventing and reducing poverty.

Improving social dialogue must go hand in hand with dialogue with other stakeholders, including civil society. Your contribution on the ground is crucial and can help the most vulnerable to make themselves heard.

The EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable European Semester (Semester Alliance)

As mentioned above, EAPN led a project in 2014 called the “[Semester Alliance](#)”, aimed at building a cross-sectoral alliance among European NGOs, to work together and impact the European Semester and Europe 2020, from a social, equality, environmental, and democratic perspective. Its comprehensive, joint analysis report on the European Semester ([Let's make the European semester smart, sustainable and inclusive](#)) includes a whole section (page 19, in the National Reform Programmes chapter) dedicated to “Stakeholder Engagement – Some positive examples of participatory practice”. The short video on the work of the Alliance, [A Beating Heart for a Better Europe](#), also includes very useful quotes from MEPs Jean Lambert (UK, Greens/EFA) and Marian Harkin (IE, ALDE), as well as Commission officials and other interlocutors, about the added value and necessity of meaningful stakeholder engagement.

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The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is an independent network of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union, established in 1990.



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