



Participation



Rights



Justice



Solidarity



Equality



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

REPORT

Can the Semester deliver on poverty and participation?

EAPN Assessment of the National Reform Programmes 2015

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure macroeconomic policies deliver on social objectives.
- Demonstrate a strong social dimension: an integrated anti-poverty strategy based on active inclusion and investment in social standards.
- Get serious about participation and NGO involvement.

September 2015

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS	4
EAPN MEMBERS' ASSESSMENT OF 2015 NRPs	9
1. <i>General Assessment</i>	9
2. <i>Macroeconomic Policies</i>	10
3. <i>Poverty and social exclusion</i>	23
4. <i>Employment</i>	38
5. <i>Education and Training</i>	49
6. <i>Structural Funds</i>	57
7. <i>National Social Reports</i>	64
8. <i>Governance and Participation</i>	67

INTRODUCTION

Context

2015 has seen the first full year of operation of the new Commission and Parliament. President Juncker's Political Guidelines have set the tone for substantial changes in the European Semester focus and process. The new priorities have been investment, restructuring and fiscal consolidation, prioritizing simplification and EU actions that bring an added value to Member States. However, Europe 2020 and the Mid-Term Review seem to be at risk of being forgotten along with the poverty target and flagship platform. A key concern for anti-poverty NGOs has been whether these changes will signpost a step back or forward on Social Europe and poverty reduction, and whether there will be more desire to engage with civil society in a context of growing alienation from the EU. Strong fears have emerged about the loss of focus on the poverty and other social targets, and whether a social dimension will be visible in the new EU vision. Will the EU move away from damaging austerity? Will it go beyond a narrow growth and jobs approach to support inclusive and sustainable growth that can promote social inclusion and cohesion? Can it develop a coherent anti-poverty strategy and invest in social standards - so that nobody is left behind? Will concerns about 'greater ownership' lead to real dialogue with civil society and people most affected, and help restore some much needed credibility and legitimacy to the EU processes? The 2015 NRPs mark the first opportunity to assess whether the new leadership can bring positive impacts on poverty and participation, and progress towards a Social EU that puts people first.

Scope of the report

The report provides a synthesis of EAPN members' assessment of the 2015 NRPs: on how far the NRPs are delivering on the social targets of Europe 2020 (particularly the poverty target, but also the employment and education targets) and on the effectiveness of civil society stakeholders' engagement with the governance process of the Semester and Europe 2020. It is based on responses from 21 National EAPN networks (BE, HR, CZ, CY, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, ES, HU, IE, IT, LV, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, UK and with input from EAPN Iceland, as a benchmarking exercise). Inputs were also received from FEANTSA, AGE-Platform and Eurodiaconia. The draft report was discussed in the meeting of the EU Inclusion Strategies Group in Bilbao, on the 2nd of July. The report was drafted by the EAPN Policy Team: Sian Jones, Amana Ferro with support from Antonino Sorrenti (Intern). The style of the report is non-academic, and provides a direct picture of grass-root organisations' assessment and concerns, rather than a formal analysis of the NRPs.

KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The main messages from the report highlight the continued failure of the Semester to establish an adequate balance between economic and social objectives and to make progress on the target to reduce poverty. The loss of visibility to Europe 2020 and the targets in the NRPs has reinforced the narrow macroeconomic focus, still prioritizing harmful “austerity” measures which are cutting vital benefits and services, with little visible concern around limiting the social impact, although some countries have made limited efforts to improve the adequacy of their social systems.

Some countries have seen a more visible return to growth and investment., however the focus is mainly on large infrastructure projects aiming only at stimulating growth. But there are little signs of investment in good quality jobs in health, education and social services which can address the ageing population and need for a healthy well educated workforce, as well as ensuring adequate quality social protection. Opportunities to promote inclusive growth-friendly taxation which can support better redistribution, reduce inequality and finance social protection systems, have also generally not been seized.

In terms of social policies, there are few NRPs which give a strong focus to the poverty target, nor provide a clear justification for current trends or comprehensive strategies to achieve it. There is a ‘concept gap’ around what works – with an over-reliance on ‘a job at any price’ and increasing conditionality to ‘make work pay’ as the main solution to poverty, despite the lack of quality jobs, growing in-work poverty and precariousness. There are worryingly few signs of investment in integrated Active Inclusion approaches, underpinned by strong social protection systems.

The focus on ‘individual priority groups’, apart from youth, too often appears adhoc, rather than an evidence-based appraisal of actual at-risk groups in each country or implementation of agreed EU strategies (ie Investing in Children, Tackling Homelessness); policies to tackle discrimination, poverty and exclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities are also notable for their absence. Surprisingly little priority is given to reporting on the key role of ring-fencing 20% of ESF to support poverty reduction, with worrying signs of funds being used to merely continue existing employment programmes, with limited engagement of NGO partners in Monitoring Committees, despite the new Code of Conduct on partnership.

On the issue of participation, whilst stakeholder engagement continues to be weak and low quality in the NRPs, EAPN members report some welcome progress in a few countries, with signs of stronger pressure from the Commission and Council formations to invest in better engagement. However this engagement still falls short of genuine dialogue which can engage civil society as partners in the design, delivery and implementation of key programmes to deliver key social objectives and reduce poverty.

Key Messages to the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) 2016

1. Ensure macroeconomic policies deliver on social objectives

Macroeconomic policies need to be put on a par with social objectives, and at the service of social inclusion and cohesion. Europe 2020 goals and targets must be restored to the heart of the Semester. Transparent social impact assessment must be carried out on all policies, including austerity measures, to ensure a coherent approach that invests in inclusive and sustainable growth. Social policy must be seen as an investment not a cost, and as a pre-requisite for high quality growth and social inclusion, combined with equitable tax/benefit systems that can redistribute wealth more fairly and reduce inequality.

2. Demonstrate a strong social dimension: an integrated anti-poverty strategy and investment in social standards

The Semester must demonstrate an explicit social dimension, with specific sections in the NRP linked to delivery on the Europe 2020 poverty and other social targets, with CSRs on poverty for all countries. An integrated anti-poverty strategy must be developed to tackle the multidimensionality of poverty for all groups, based on personalized, integrated Active Inclusion (inclusive labour markets, adequate minimum income and access to quality services) underpinned by quality social protection and linked to thematic strategies for at-risk groups; EU social standards must be progressed to ensure an *adequate income throughout the life cycle*: with priority given to EU frameworks for adequate minimum income and social protection, living minimum wages and quality jobs.

3. Get serious about participation and NGO involvement

Effective civil society involvement at all stages of the Semester process (design, delivery and evaluation) is crucial and must demonstrate policy impact. A process must be launched to develop common guidelines and indicators to measure the effectiveness of stakeholder dialogue, monitored/reviewed annually through the Semester. Transform Semester Officers into 'participation officers' with resources to support NGO involvement, including people with direct experience of poverty while promoting exchange of inspiring practices.

Specific Messages

More detailed messages from each policy field covered by the NRP are set out below.

Macroeconomic

1. Spending cuts targeted most on the poor must be stopped – implement social/poverty impact assessment.

The continuing drive on 'austerity' prioritizes cuts to services and social protection that undermine fundamental rights, deepening poverty and preventing a sustainable and inclusive recovery. The promised social impact assessment on austerity proposals must be implemented now.

2. Increase social investment, back social standards and access to quality services.

Social investment is a benefit not a cost and this should inform and underpin policy and policy-making. Universal social protection is key to preventing risk of poverty. Social

standards are needed to ensure that the internal market is not prioritised at the expense of guaranteeing access to affordable and quality social, education and health services for all.

3. An inclusive tax policy can drive sustainable, inclusive growth.

Tax finances social protection, public services and government investment in the generation of future wealth. Efficient and equitable tax policy and tax collection with decisive action against tax evasion and avoidance is fundamental to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth and must be given a higher policy priority. Priority should be given to closing tax havens and promoting progressive taxation.

Poverty

1. Take the poverty target seriously!

All Member States should adopt ambitious national targets using all 3 EU indicators, and transparently monitor their progress together with stakeholders.

2. Prioritize an ambitious, integrated anti-poverty strategy for all groups

Put in place an overarching multidimensional strategy to fight poverty for all groups, based on rights and access to quality jobs, social protection and services. This should provide the basis for thematic strategies, implementing priorities of the Social Investment Package – tackling homelessness, investing in Children and Roma inclusion. New priority should be given to tackling exclusion of migrants.

3. Invest in an adequate income through the life cycle

Investment in adequate minimum income and social protection is key to provide a strong foundation for a sustainable recovery and investment-in-people approach. The EU should make progress on supporting a framework and benchmarks to ensure quality social standards and a right to an adequate income throughout the life cycle.

Employment

1. Change the approach to the employment target!

Ensure that monitoring is also underpinned by quality job indicators, which promote good jobs, instead of fostering more precariousness and in-work poverty. Build positive synergies between the employment and the poverty-reduction targets of Europe 2020.

2. Support quality job creation, accessible to all groups!

Real investment is needed in jobs that last, providing decent incomes and adequate protection, in order to boost demand and purchasing power, as well as to protect people from poverty and exclusion.

3. Place employment as a route out of poverty within comprehensive anti-poverty and inclusion strategies!

Employment alone is not the answer to poverty – quality work is one element, which should be placed within comprehensive strategies, which tackle the multi-faceted nature of poverty, based on integrated Active Inclusion Strategies.

Education and Training

1. Support access to education for all!

There are complex social and economic obstacles people face in accessing educational opportunities, including discrimination, and governments must do more to establish integrated measures for families and children at risk of poverty, exclusion and segregation.

2. Restore adequate funding for education!

Roll back cuts in public spending that have significantly impacted on the quality and availability of education and support services, particularly those programmes reaching disadvantaged groups, and mark education as an investment priority.

3. Don't leave lifelong learning behind!

Support people's right to access educational opportunities throughout the lifecycle, by providing them with the necessary support and second-chance opportunities to further their education, in a broader sense than only equipping them with labour market skills, by offering opportunities to improve quality of life.

Structural Funds

1. Agree transparent mechanisms for monitoring effective delivery on poverty

Monitoring that 20% ESF is spent on poverty is not enough. It is the quality of the spending which counts. Ensure that Member States show how EU funds contribute to the poverty target, and monitor the effectiveness of their spending.

2. 20% must go beyond employment! – Fund innovative approaches to integrated Active Inclusion!

There is a risk that the 20% of ESF will be spent entirely on existing programmes for tackling unemployment, with few guarantees of progress into quality jobs. The programmes must invest in broader, integrated active inclusion approaches as well as backing social investment, particularly in social infrastructure such as affordable quality housing and early learning/childcare.

3. Press for real delivery of the partnership principle and involvement of small NGOs

Despite the Code of Conduct on Partnership, early information indicates low participation of NGOs in Monitoring Committees, and major obstacles to access funding. The partnership principle must be regularly monitored together with stakeholders to ensure that requirements are met, including access to funds.

National Social Report

1. Focus the NSR on reporting progress on the Social OMC and Social Agenda

The added value of the NSR is in providing the detail on a broader Social Agenda focused on social protection and social inclusion. It should be linked to commitments to deliver on access to rights, resources and services, underpinned by the Common Objectives of the Social OMC, as well as Europe 2020.

2. Change the timing and process and make the NSR obligatory

The NSR must be treated with same importance as NRP. This means the timing must be changed to feed in earlier to the NRP. There also needs to be joint reporting frame and report with the Commission, to ensure the proposals are taken seriously in the Semester.

3. Make the NSR the champion on participation!

Current participation is very weak. The NSR should be setting the example and providing guidelines and inspiring examples of how to do effective participation with stakeholders including people experiencing poverty, and transfer knowledge to Europe 2020 and the European Semester.

Governance and Participation

1. Participation is key to restoring EU credibility with civil society actors

The participation of people experiencing poverty and their NGOs in quality stakeholder dialogue is key to restoring democratic legitimacy, accountability and confidence in the EU. However, it must lead to real impact on policy development to combat poverty.

2. Agree Common Quality Guidelines/ Indicators on participation

The widening gap in the extent and quality of NGO engagement across Member States in the Semester requires urgent action. Common guidelines should establish benchmarks and indicators for regular constructive dialogue with stakeholders at all stages of the process which are monitored/reviewed annually through the Semester. Exchange of inspiring practices should also be encouraged.

3. Give the European Semester Officer a clear role to engage NGOs

The role of the Semester Officer is crucial, with funds and access to decision-makers at the national and EU level. Transform their role into 'participation officers', with a specific brief to engage NGOs and support them to involve people with direct experience of poverty.

EAPN MEMBERS' ASSESSMENT OF 2015 NRPs

1. General Assessment

In the general scoreboard, the NRPs continue to be seen by EAPN members as a macroeconomic and financial surveillance instrument rather than a tool to support delivery on Europe 2020's poverty and social targets. "Austerity" is still the dominant focus. Although there are more signs of investment it is not *social* investment. Most EAPN members feel that the crisis continues to be unequally distributed, with the burden falling disproportionately on low and moderate income people and those already disadvantaged. The lack of an integrated anti-poverty strategy in most countries is noted and low commitment to inclusive labour markets, education systems and universal quality social protection systems as key investment priorities.

The NSR has also fallen short of its potential role to reinforce policy delivery on the poverty target in the NRP. The NRP gives little sign so far of an effective use of the 20% of ESF to deliver such integrated strategies, despite the ex-ante conditionality in place. Finally in terms of governance - whilst more networks were engaged in the NRP than previously and with some positive examples emerging, the overall quality of the engagement continues to be weak, with low policy impact.

SUMMARY SCOREBOARD: EAPN MEMBERS' VIEWS ON 2015 NRPS

88 %	The burden of the crisis is not being equally distributed.
88 %	The NRPs do not have poverty as a main priority, and employment (with increased conditionality) is proposed as the only solution to fight against poverty.
88 %	Social protection is seen as a cost not a benefit, nor a social investment.
76 %	Austerity, is still the dominant focus of NRPs and is generating more poverty and social exclusion.
76 %	The NRPs do not mention increasing quality jobs and tackling in-work poverty as key priorities in the NRP.
76 %	Anti-poverty NGOs were not taken seriously into account in the NRPs.
71 %	The NRPs lack an integrated strategy on poverty, supporting active inclusion – access to quality jobs, services and adequate minimum income.
65 %	The NRPs are primarily aimed at macroeconomic and financial management not on Europe 2020 targets.
65 %	The NRPs are more focused on investment, but not on social investment.
59 %	The education and training measures are primarily aimed at increasing skills not at ensuring a comprehensive quality education system.
53 %	Agreed that no progress has been made on implementing key EU social investment priorities – particularly investing in children and tackling homelessness.
53 %	Considered that the employment measures proposed in the NRPs are not the right ones to ensure access to quality jobs for all.
53%	The National Social Reports (NSRs) do not underpin and strengthen the delivery on poverty in the NRP.
47%	Of anti-poverty NGOs were consulted in the development of the NRPs.
Only 35%	Structural Funds are being used effectively to reduce poverty and deliver on 20% of ESF.

2. Macroeconomic Policies

Introduction

The Macroeconomic Chapter is the key section of the National Reform Programme (NRP) and is meant to provide the outlook for the future as well as review progress on key macroeconomic objectives. It complements the parallel Stability and Convergence Programme (SCP), although the measures proposed in the latter are not always transparent in the NRP, nor their impact.

The main priority currently is striving for balanced budgets, (debt and deficit reduction), reducing macroeconomic imbalances and progress on key structural reforms i.e. in the labour market and social and health systems.

From the Guidance Note, Member States are explicitly expected to justify how they have delivered on the macroeconomic CSRs 2014. In the AGS 2015, the key priorities reflect President Juncker's 10 Political Guidelines: Investment, Restructuring and Fiscal Consolidation. The section is also expected to highlight *potential social and environmental impact*, however there is little evidence from members that this has been put into practice.

The dominant trend continues to be fiscal consolidation concentrated on cuts to benefits and services, with some movement on investment and growth-friendly measures, particularly in the area of tax, but without a social investment priority.

This chapter assesses members' views on how far the macroeconomic policies are supporting or undermining the commitment to reduce poverty through the poverty target.

National Assessments: positive, negative and what's missing

BELGIUM

Positive measures

Some tax reforms seem positive, but the effect is marginal, and even undone by other (negative) measures. At the time the NRP was written, there was not an agreement yet on the so called "tax-shift". However, now there is. The effects of these tax reforms in the framework of the "tax-shift" are important and mostly negative, increasing poverty and inequality.

Negative measures

Austerity is threatening the quality and accessibility of social services and basic rights (decent income, education, healthcare etc.) Activation comes without the necessary job creation, and punitive activation is threatening decent income. The overall redistribution goes in the wrong direction.

Since the end of July 2015, there has been an agreement on the tax shift announced in the NRP, (the so-called tax shift). It was announced as a redistribution tool, which should rebalance the negative effects for people experiencing poverty of other measures taken by the government. Unfortunately, the so-called tax shift does not put the burden on the strongest shoulders, on the contrary, the people with the lowest incomes again pay the price. Neither is it a broad tax reform that makes the fiscal system more transparent, nor fairer.

Some examples:

- Less taxes for employers (= less budget for social security) without any guarantees for job creation; Increase of VAT on electricity; A symbolic tax on speculation (that will cost more than it will yield), with a loophole for fiscal optimisation; Less benefits for people who

become ill (& they will have to wait longer to receive their benefits); more taxes on diesel and so called “fat-tax” (good for environmental and health issues, but this makes life more expensive, especially for people experiencing poverty, who often have no other choices).

- There is also the mention of an increase of the net wage by 100 euro a month, but it is absolutely not clear when or how or for who this will be. The budget foreseen is much too limited, it doesn't mean anything for people excluded from the labour market, and even the people who might receive this, will already have spent the money, given the increase of several prices, due to increases in VAT).

What's missing

Quality job creation: there are fiscal incentives for the enterprises, without any guarantee, and without any obligation concerning job creation.

Real increases of the lowest incomes (benefits and wages). Net increases that take into account the real cost of living.

CROATIA

Positive measures

In 2014 the Croatian Government adopted the 2014-2020 Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Croatia as the basic document of a current poverty and social exclusion situation as well as a social and economic projection as a basis for dealing with issues of poverty and social exclusion.

It is proposed, following the implementation of the Implementation Programme for the Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion of the Republic of Croatia (2014-2020) for the period from 2014 to 2016, to implement measures for alleviating the situation of persons in poverty during 2015 and 2016.

Negative measures

The overall impression is that there is still a strong focus on fiscal consolidation and cost savings in the social protection system, without targeted measures and programmes that have a real potential to change the situation of particularly vulnerable groups - people with disabilities, the homeless, single parents, the long-term unemployed, and other vulnerable groups.

What's missing

There are neither clear plans nor incentives aimed at raising the quality and availability of social services. It is a modernization of the system and general strengthening of the social protection system that is required.

CYPRUS

Positive measures

Cyprus has to follow the commitments made in the Troika's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and even though some positive measures have been taken in some cases, the effect is marginal, and new problems are created by other negative measures.

Negative measures

Due to the effort of saving the banks (that are responsible for the financial problems in the country) and the “austerity programme” that implements the fiscal, structural and institutional reform measures from the MoU on specific strict economic policy conditionality, the Social State and benefits especially for vulnerable people are continually and increasingly reduced. This happens at the same time as new phenomena of poverty and new vulnerable groups are showing up, such as working poor, mainly because of long-term unemployment.

What's missing

A political will to protect people from falling in poverty and exclusion because of the mistakes in the policies made at national and European Level, leaving the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to care about the well-being of figures and not of people.

CZECH REPUBLIC***Positive measures***

Prioritising growth-supporting expenditures can be positive if it is invested in social prevention, inclusive education etc. The review of the indexation of pensions can be positive.

DENMARK***Positive measures***

There is a growing investment in public health, also for the poor.

Negative measures

There is a decrease in investment of jobs to those who are not 100% fit. The general tendency is a growing inequality, coming from cuts in benefits and services as well as tax policies, favouring people with high income.

What's missing

Improvements to social benefits and flexicurity. Minimum income schemes are decreasing, slightly but steadily.

FINLAND***Positive measures***

Increasing employment.

Negative measures

Expenditure savings and cuts to local government duties and obligations. This means that municipalities will have less money for services. Prolonging working careers also means lower level of pensions.

What's missing

Explicit effort to decrease poverty or to reduce inequality.

FRANCE***Negative measures***

EAPN France is worried about several measures: in particular Local Authorities will have to contribute to the national savings plan, which means a decrease of the State Grants for local authorities of around 11 billion euros. It means that local authorities will have less money to implement social action policies. This will have a negative impact on the fight against poverty, meanwhile the context is that social benefit demands are greater in number, and in amount requested..

The government proposes to extend the taxation base which means to increase consumption taxes. Such tax is not proportional to salaries and affects everybody in the same way. Then poorer people will be the ones that will lose most of the decrease in purchasing power which is already very low.

GERMANY

Positive measures

The project of the last year was realised and has been regulated by law.

- Introduction of a statutory minimum wage (8,50 €),
- Many different measures for training and reintegration into working life,
- Pensions for mothers who gave birth to children before 1992 are rewarded with additional points in the pension system and increase in disability pension benefits.

Negative measures

Contributions to the compulsory health insurance are in favour of the employer. The jobholders have to pay more and there is no limit for the increasing costs.

What's missing

A view of the people in poverty and a critical analysis of the framework conditions which discriminate socially-disadvantaged persons.

HUNGARY

Positive measures

Some elements of the material deprivation index have been improved in the bottom three deciles, probably as an impact of government utility prices cuts. But in our opinion this is not a sustainable method of handling the utility bill problems. There is also a 2.4% improvement in one dimension of the risk of relative income poverty or social exclusion than in 2013. The rate of those living in severe material deprivation decreased by 2.9%.

Negative measures

The tax system is still not in favour of people experiencing poverty, adequate reform is missing, for example VAT (27%) is still one of the highest in the EU.

What's missing

An adequate tax reform in order to reduce inequalities, a macro-economic policy in favour of small and medium size enterprises, and a development-friendly economic environment.

IRELAND

Positive measures

The recovery of the economy and the end of seven years of austerity policies.

Negative measures

In April 2015 the Government presented its first Spring Statement. This document outlines how it will use the revenue generated by the expected benefits of economic growth in 2015 and the coming years. Instead of looking at investing this money the Government plans to give half of it back in tax reductions. After a period of sustained cuts to social protection and public services and when there is need for huge investment in these areas from a social and economic perspective, this approach is extremely worrying. This approach already started in Budget 2015 with the Government committing four times the amount it gave in tax reductions to what it gave in increases in social welfare expenditure. This resulted in a regressive budget with those on higher incomes benefitting most and those on lowest incomes the least.

What's missing

There is no mention of poverty, equality or gender impact assessment of economic policy.

This has been one of the key policy proposals of EAPN Ireland over the past number of years.

LATVIA

Negative measures

State-guaranteed benefit is less than 600 Euros a year, which is four times under the basic survival level, driving people into poverty. There are no real job offers for people in poverty and marginalized groups. In terms of utility services, some state capital companies (enterprises and joint stock companies) sell utility services like electricity and communications at regulated prices, but are allowed to make profits. The prices are too high for people at risk of poverty, whilst company personnel have very high salaries.

What's missing

Need for adequate minimum income and for benefits and pensions to be higher, with adequate price regulation of utilities and other services to make them accessible for people in poverty.

LUXEMBOURG

Positive measures

None.

Negative measures

Budgetary cuts in social services and benefits instead of raising taxes.

What's missing

An integrated strategy instead of a juxtaposition of measures, with a clear involvement of stakeholders.

MALTA

Positive measures

Training for employment especially targeting NEETs (young people not in education or employment).

Negative measures

An imbalanced tax system, and inadequate and unfair distribution of welfare benefits and low and precarious wages.

What's missing

A concrete economic policy (ideology) to focus on social policies that target the elimination of poverty and social exclusion.

NETHERLANDS

Positive measures

Extra millions to tackle severe debts and child poverty.

The fact that the Ministry of SA&E has an open mind concerning the problems of those in Long Term Unemployed and poverty. Extra money to tackle youth unemployment.

Negative measures

No real change in policy. A kind of swap between more money for employment schemes against a more severe kind of social policing.

The decrease of our healthcare.

The constant rise of the rents of social housing and the decrease of rent supply.

What's missing

A vision on how to end poverty, to create a society in which there is a place for all. Only economics count. The government vision is to create paid jobs (participation). These should bring people out of poverty. Reality is an increase in people earning the minimum wage or even less.

POLAND***Positive measures***

Optimistic predictions in macro-economic scenario in respect of employment rate and GDP growth.

Negative measures

Fiscal discipline required by excessive deficit procedure was the main argument against social assistance reform. The Ministry of Finance successfully blocked the reform designed by Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and included in the national anti-poverty programme. That information was not included in the NRP.

What's missing

Specification of macro-economic policies. They were in another document (Convergence Programme).

PORTUGAL***Positive measures***

Maintain the evolution of minimum wage; Fight the shadow economy.

Negative measures

The reduction in health spending must be evaluated, especially in what concerns its impact on people's well-being and people in poverty and social exclusion. There are some measures that are being implemented that raise some doubts: for example, the recent proposal of the Government to transfer the management of public health units and the provision of health care to private non-for-profit social organisations (mainly to the Misericórdias). The Spring Report of 2013 states that this shows a disengagement of the State in what concerns public services administration and a lack of trust in the management capacity of those persons that the State itself appointed to manage health organisms.

The idea that early retirement policy will improve the entrance of the younger people into the labour market is also negative. A transitional regime was established for 2015 that allows beneficiaries who are 60 or over and with 40 years of insurance history, to access their pensions early. Several studies at European level have already showed that this relation is not happening. This is also a "strange" measure, considering the demographic ageing of the Portuguese population.

What's missing

Mainly the relation with poverty and social exclusion, especially the impact of some of these measures in the reduction/increasing of these phenomena.

SPAIN***Positive measures***

The NRP has included a new "Social Agenda", which is partly a compilation of already existing policies and measures, and some new ones. Among the latter, some were proposed by the NGOs

Negative measures

Spain is under the Excessive Deficit Procedure, and further macroeconomic adjustment has been required on behalf the European Commission. Deficit reduction implies more cuts in social services, an overall reduction of 18 billion Euros.

What's missing

The focus on social priorities.

SWEDEN

Positive measures

One positive aspect is mentioning the need for a housing policy also for middle and low income people. Another important issue is highlighting the need for reconstruction of the welfare systems in order to achieve better welfare and security for all. It is also very positive that there is no mention of further austerity measures. Instead the talk is about increased public investments.

Negative measures

A general focus on diminishing the gaps and increasing inequality in society.

UK

Positive measures

There is growth in GDP.

Negative Measures

A strategy of fiscal consolidation based on expenditure cuts and weighted heavily to welfare benefits cuts to poor and low income people of working age, and within that, women and children and people with a disability.

What's missing

Any end date for "austerity" macroeconomics.

Acknowledgement of the negative impact of sustained expenditure cuts on access to adequate income from social protection, access to services and even access to justice.

Social investment expenditure – e.g. in social housing and education.

UK/SCOTLAND

Positive measures

Strong statements highlighting the need to both reduce inequality and encourage economic growth.

Negative measures

Continued austerity by the UK Government.

What's missing

Additional investment in housing.

Benchmarking Iceland

Positive measures

Divided tax system. Lower unemployment rate.

Negative measures

Higher costs in the health care system. Plans to change the tax system. The VAT on food was raised from 7% to 11%.

What's missing

Plans to eliminate poverty!

Key Concerns

Macroeconomic policies reflect CSRs and fail to help to reduce poverty

The macroeconomic proposals are generally seen to be implementing the CSRs and the AGS priorities (BE, BG, HR, CZ, HU, IE, IT, LV, LU, MT, PL, PT, ES, UK). In most countries, this means that the macroeconomic priorities appear to ignore social objectives and targets, focusing on public administration and simplification, competitiveness, restructuring labour markets, reducing the tax burden and revision and reduction of public expenditure through cuts in social spending (BE, CY, DK, IT, LU, UK/Scotland). Priority is still given to fiscal consolidation and requirements of the Stability and Growth Pact, and not always in a transparent fashion (LV, PL, PT).

There are no signs that the requirements to consider the social impact of economic policy from the Guidelines are taken into consideration. A small minority highlight more heartening signs of a shift away from austerity (CZ, IE, SE) or to promoting investment in consumption (DE), or of intentions to 'mainstream an explicit Social Agenda' (ES). However, none have put into place 'a poverty, gender or equality impact assessment' (IE) or include a critical analysis of the framework conditions which discriminate against socially disadvantaged people and generate poverty and inequality" (DE). Whilst in Spain, the Third Sector including EAPN Spain have succeeded in getting a Social Agenda included in the NRP which includes commitments to ensure fairer redistribution of the effort to exit the crisis, this is without clear budget commitments and dominated by requirements for further macroeconomic adjustment. Only in Scotland, does the network feel there is an explicit intention that macroeconomic policy should contribute to the goal of reducing poverty and inequality.

Deficit reduction still prioritizing cuts in social spending

Despite increased rhetoric around investment, deficit reduction continues as the dominant priority in many countries particularly for those under excessive deficit procedures or Troika programmes (CY, HR, HU, PL, PT, ES, UK). In most cases, the main measure proposed is **austerity cuts to public, mainly social, spending rather than increases in revenue i.e. through tax**. In Croatia, the requirement is to cut the deficit to 4.6% in 2014, 3.5% in 2015 and 2.7% in 2016, with the recommendation that Croatia adopt austerity measures/fiscal consolidation of 2.3% in 2014, 1% of GDP in 2015 and 2016 which will lead to 'tough adjustments' in social spending (HR). Similarly in Hungary. In Spain, 18 billion Euros of cuts are required, hitting social services. In the UK, £12bn of welfare benefits cuts are being made in addition to £19bn cuts already made. The ratio of cuts to revenue already made is calculated as 85:15 with about 80% of cuts borne by women and children. The government is aiming for a **budget surplus** (now delayed by one further year) which will build permanent austerity into government policy.

Often the concrete impact of the deficit procedure is not always transparent in the NRP. EAPN Poland highlights that the **Stability and Convergence Programme (SCP) sets out the main requirements which are not reflected in the NRP**. The Polish Minister of Finance has blocked the proposed reform/improvement of social assistance in 2013 and 2014, quoting requirements of the EU deficit procedure, despite the reform being part of the national anti-poverty framework required as an ex-ante conditionality for ESF signed by Government in August 2014.

Austerity continues to threaten rights and undermine inclusive recovery

There is a more **uneven picture regarding austerity measures** and impacts. Whilst many highlight continuing negative impact (BE, CY, FI, HU, UK), others emphasize a move away (IE MT, SE). Where austerity cuts are still in place, **attacks to rights are increasing poverty** (BE, CY, FI, HU, UK). However, members **underline broader social and economic implications** on jobs, undermining consumption and the potential for an inclusive recovery, as underlined by the recent IMF¹ report. In Belgium, cuts particularly hit people on middle and low incomes, as well as their access to income, education and health care, cutting jobs at a time when they are most needed. In Finland, indexing of benefits has been frozen whilst cuts to local governments' budgets means less money for services. In Malta, although direct payments of social benefits were increased marginally (by 0.50 Euros), the lack of uprating for inflation means the actual value of benefits decreases (BE, FI, MT). In the UK, the 9 July 2015 budget renewed the focus on cuts to low income working age households, taking a further 1£ in 10£, including £4.5 billion cuts in tax credits, the removal of £30 per week additional allowance for disabled people of working age currently unable to work, further cuts in housing allowances particularly for young people and a welfare 'cap' of £20,000 per annum outside London. According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, benefits cuts will affect 13 million households.

However, the **cuts don't just hurt the poor**. The arguments that austerity is fundamentally undermining recovery and inclusive growth, as well as driving widening inequality gap, as put forward by the OECD and IMF do not appear to be taken seriously. As Italy points out, the NRP *'ignores benefits to growth of healthy welfare states with savings derived from prevention, the current model is only to buffer emergencies'*.

¹ IMF report on causes and consequences of growing inequality /June 2015.

Limited signs of social investment and reinforcing welfare states

In a few countries there are more signs of an investment approach, with **increase in investment in adequate income support systems** (DE, ES IE, IT, MT, SE, UK/Scotland – although in UK all benefits have been frozen or cut). In Germany, there's been an increase of disability pensions, pensions for mothers, as well as increases in the minimum wage. Scotland has limited powers, but has announced its intention to increase funding for emergency support to people on low incomes, by introducing a Scottish Welfare Fund to replace the Social Fund scrapped by the UK Government. It has also not implemented Council Tax benefits reductions from the UK and promoted a programme of welfare reform 'mitigation' ensuring access to advice/information. In Italy, a series of measures have been implemented to strengthen income support: the scope of unemployment benefit has been made more universal also to precarious forms of work, and supporting the weaker unemployed with additional measures of income support tied to activation. Also it has given an increase and more structured funding for the poor i.e. the baby bonus for new-borns of 960 Euros until 31 December 2017, doubled for the poorest households, 45 million Euros for large families, increased Social Card extended to all EU citizens and their families (IT). In Sweden, a more ambitious approach is underlined concerning **reconstruction of welfare systems to achieve better welfare and security**. However, a step back from austerity does not always imply social investment. Ireland has its first non-austerity budget as government believes it can meet targets through existing measures, however there is no explicit rhetoric around social investment, or link with social goals. When viewing the prospect of a surplus, the government has made clear that its aim will be to reduce taxes rather than maximising the use of the available resources to invest in social systems. In the Czech Republic, the new investment approach is seen as positive and 'growth-friendly' if investment takes place in social prevention and inclusive education.

Raising retirement ages fails to ensure adequacy of pensions

The EU requirement seen widely in the CSRs to raise retirement ages, is a strong concern for many members. The arguments about **sustainability appear to overshadow concerns about the adequacy of pensions and income support**, particularly for those who were in low waged or precarious work or have become unemployed, but are unable to access their pensions (FI, DE, PT, UK). In Finland, the proposal to prolong working lives is seen as directly linked to lower levels of pensions. Comprehensive pension reform is taking place in most countries, but often it is unclear if it is undermining constitutional frameworks e.g. in Portugal, where the measures presented in 2014 were not approved by Constitutional Court, and some transitional measures remain in 2015 (for example, the solidarity special fee applied to pensions, lack of updating: except minimum income, social and rural). A rise however is planned in the standard age of retirement entitlement. Some inconsistencies are still apparent in supporting early retirement (over 60 and with 40 years of insurance history) with the justification that it will improve job access for youth, although this is not backed by current evidence. AGE-Platform Europe argues that **increases in retirement ages should be linked to healthy years** (i.e. the EU indicator - increasing healthy years by 2 years by 2020). However, recent data since 2008 has shown that healthy years have decreased by 1 year, which indicates that austerity reforms are having an impact on the Commission's own indicator. On a positive note, some **examples of increases** are also highlighted e.g. in Germany, where pensions for mothers who gave birth to children before 1992 will mean additional points in the pension system. In the UK, the protective 'triple lock' on state pensions has so far been maintained including universal pensioner benefits such as winter fuel allowance.

Increased focus on growth-friendly tax, but likely to increase inequality

Several members highlight an increased focus on tax policy (BE, CZ, EE, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, ES, UK). However the main priority is promoting **'growth-friendly' taxation**, which is **'budget neutral', rather than integrating social impact assessment** and recognising the key redistributive role of taxation to reduce inequality which as recent international reports by the OECD and IMF show, is good for growth. **Broadening the tax base** is a key recommendation (CZ) which is mainly focussed on sustainability, without mentioning progressive or social impact (IE). In Ireland's case, the government plans to give back money from expected economic growth in tax cuts, rather than social investment (i.e. 4 times more the amount in tax reductions than increases in social welfare in Budget 2015– this means a regressive budget with those on higher incomes benefitting most and those on lowest incomes the least). In other countries, positive measures include **reducing the tax burden on low income earners** (CZ, HU), or increasing tax credits (IT) with an annual tax credit of 960 Euros for those who earn less than 24.000 Euros. However in other countries, the reverse path is taken (MT), where personal income tax rates are reduced for medium and high earners and not for the poor, increasing the regressiveness of the system.

A key priority from the CSRs is **increasing consumption taxes** (VAT), which are inherently regressive as they disproportionately hit the poor hardest who spend more of their income on basic goods and services (EE, HU, LU). In Estonia, increases in petrol, diesel, alcohol, tobacco also impact on jobs as firms have moved to Latvia. Even if Luxembourg's VAT is still among the lowest in the EU, it has nevertheless been increased by two percentage points on 1st January 2015. In Hungary, VAT is the highest in the EU (27%). In other cases, positive tax measures are often outweighed by the overall impact of a **regressive tax approach**. For example positive initiatives on capital and wealth taxes (BE), are seen as marginal within the overall tax policy, as for example increasing consumption tax on electricity and the announced increased tax on diesel and tobacco. In Bulgaria, the same tax system of flat rate taxes is pursued, which is deeply regressive. However, no CSRs have been directed at this, although the government tries to tackle tax evasion and have the support of the Commission to do this. **Increasing tax collection** (CZ) and **tackling tax evasion and avoidance** is also highlighted (BE, HU, UK), although in the case of UK, this is balanced by a priority given to limiting tax revenue, including some tax cuts e.g. tax incentives for business, related to capital investment and employment of young people (by removing employer contributions).

On a positive note, Scotland aims to take a more progressive approach to **property tax**, aiming to ensure that tax not only addresses distortions in the housing market but are progressive i.e. higher rates for larger properties and least expensive are exempt. Notably in Spain, the NRP takes on board the Third Sector/EAPN proposals in the NRP for a more equitable tax system, with higher rate cuts for middle and low incomes, enabling 20 million tax payers to have more disposable income. However, it's not clear how this will be implemented. In the Czech Republic, tax deductions are increased for second and subsequent children, **reducing the tax burden on families with children**, as well as deductions for childcare equivalent to the minimum wage.

Services as a market for growth rather than affordable, quality access

Services become increasingly a target in the NRPs, according to EAPN members. However, the priority is placed on **removing barriers to the internal market in services as a driver for growth**, rather than investing and defending affordable, quality services (DE, HU, IT, LV, NL, PT, ES, SE, UK). For EAPN members, core priorities are ensuring access to social, health, education and housing services, however access to utilities including energy is also a growing concern. In many NRPs, explicit recommendations are made to **reduce health expenditure** and to make it more efficient, with little visible concern about 'effectiveness' or with an assessment of the social

impact. AGE-Platform Europe highlights that the **modernization of health and long-term care** is a big topic, with a generally negative impact on access. In Portugal, a recent OECD report (Reviews of Health Care Quality: Portugal 2015) praised “*Portugal’s health system for having responded well to financial pressures, balancing financial consolidation with continuous quality improvement*”. However, although Family Health Units now have better medical assistance, in reality it only reaches 50% of population. 1,300,000 people are without a family doctor, and worse in some regions. Only 12% of people over 65 say they are in good health – the lowest in OECD. Concern is also raised about the pressure to **transfer health care to not-for-profit organisations**, with a weakening of the state’s role and responsibility. Other areas of concern relate to reforms in compulsory private health insurance (DE) which are being made in favour of the employer, with jobholders paying more with no limit on increasing costs. Some positive measures regarding **social services** are highlighted in Spain regarding a future act on public procurement on social services, to make it an instrument of ‘social integration’.

In the UK, although **Education (from age 5-16)** and Health budgets are cash-protected, large ‘efficiency’ savings still must be made, and with rising demand, access to quality services will be impacted (for example, currently all health targets have been missed). The **privatisation of education**, is also of concern, with reforms taking schools out of local authority control and enabling private suppliers to take on or create schools, undermining the local authority’s role in ensuring equal access to quality education.

Affordable Housing and Energy: key pre-requisites for reducing poverty

The erosion of affordable housing is another major priority for EAPN members (LU, SE, ES, UK/Scotland). Whilst investment in housing is given some priority in NRPs particularly for those on middle and low incomes (SE, UK), the **solutions are primarily market-driven**. Members highlight that deregulation is too often seen as the main solution, which in reality weakens the position of low income households on the housing market and make them vulnerable to unaffordable rents. Investment in affordable housing requires **an integrated approach** including the expansion of social housing, regulation of private housing rents and new housing projects to ensure they are accessible for lower income households, as well as ensuring fair access to mortgage loans and indebtedness support for low income families. In Scotland, a recent report of the Chartered Institute of Housing reported 16,000 new houses built, when the need is double. The plight of **over-indebted mortgage owners** is still of major concern in many countries (CY, IE, ES, UK). In Spain, some positive measures were won in the NRP strengthening measures to protect mortgage holders, extending the suspension of mortgage releases and raising maximum income thresholds to qualify for restructuring measures. Finally, some members highlight the crucial role of utility services e.g. energy/water, particularly in terms of their impact on poverty (HU, LV). In Hungary, the government has cut utility prices and this is seen as a likely cause of the improvement of the material deprivation index i.e. decreased by 2.9%, whilst in Latvia price regulation is not achieving affordable energy for people in poverty.

Key Messages

1. Spending cuts targeted most on the poor must be stopped – implement social/poverty impact assessment.

The continuing drive on ‘austerity’ prioritizes cuts to services and social protection that undermine fundamental rights, deepening poverty and preventing a sustainable and inclusive recovery. The promised social impact assessment on austerity proposals must be implemented now.

2. Increase social investment, back social standards and access to quality services.

Social investment is a benefit not a cost and this should inform and underpin policy and policy-making. Universal social protection is key to preventing risk of poverty. Social standards are needed to ensure that the internal market is not completed at the expense of guaranteeing access to affordable and quality social, education and health services for all.

3. An inclusive tax policy can drive sustainable, inclusive growth.

Tax finances social protection, public services and government investment in the generation of future wealth. Efficient and equitable tax policy and tax collection with decisive action against tax evasion and avoidance is fundamental to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth and must be given a higher policy priority. Priority should be given to closing tax havens and promoting progressive taxation.

3. Poverty and social exclusion

Introduction

The Guidance Note on the NRPs requires Member States to report progress on poverty reduction, and in particular the national poverty target and its contribution to the overarching Europe 2020 poverty target to reduce poverty by at least 20 million by 2020.

Overall there has been no progress on the overall target, with poverty and/or social exclusion (AROPE indicator²) increasing from 116.6 million in 2008 to 121.4 in 2013, although there has been a slight improvement since 2012 (123.1). The major increases have taken place in severe material deprivation (8.5 to 9.6 million) and in low work intensity (9.1 to 10.6). The growing poverty gap *between* Member States is extremely disturbing: with more than a third of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in five EU Member States: Bulgaria (48.0 %), Romania (40.4 %), Greece (35.7 %), Latvia (35.1 %) and Hungary (33.5 %). At the other end of the scale are Sweden (16.4 %), Finland (16.0 %), the Netherlands (15.9 %) and the Czech Republic.³

The setting of national targets is another challenge as Member States continue to set unambitious targets, which fail to add up to the EU goal (a shortfall of 8 million), with several avoiding using the EU poverty indicators, e.g. (DE, SE, UK). In the NRPs, Member States are supposed to show how progress is being made on the target with a particular emphasis on implementing active inclusion, including income support, actions to combat child poverty as well as broad access to affordable high quality services such as social and health services, childcare and energy supply. However, the priorities of the new Annual Growth Survey 2015 marked a step backwards with the loss of a specific objective 4 on Tackling Unemployment and the Social Impact of the crisis. Although reference was made to the need for adequate pension and income/social protection systems with access to quality services including childcare and early learning, no multidimensional, integrated strategy ensuring access to quality jobs, services and social protection is developed.

This chapter sets out members' assessment of how far progress is being made on the national poverty target and the development of effective anti-poverty strategies for all groups.

Positive, negative, and missing measures in Poverty policies of the NRP

BELGIUM

Positive measures

Housing First projects and increasing some minimum income benefits.

(FEANTSA): Homelessness is identified as a priority.

Negative measures

There are several negative measures, especially the decreased accessibility of income support systems.

²At risk of poverty and/or exclusion (AROPE), based on 3 indicators (at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation and low work intensity)

³Eurostat Data/ published Jan 2015.

What's missing

An overall effective ambitious approach, with decent incomes and accessible quality services. The federal anti-poverty plan is being drafted, but (taking into account the measures that our federal government announced in the governmental agreement), we are not very optimistic.

CROATIA***Positive measures***

It is anticipated that measures in the field of poverty reduction are detecting students of lower socio-economic status and persons with disabilities as target groups. The measures will be used for co-funding the cost of education: financing transportation costs, awarding scholarships for regular students of lower socio-economic status, providing free textbooks or financing or co-financing them.

Negative measures.

There is no evidence on proposed indicators; there is a lack of strategic approach since the measures are based on projects and activities within their priority areas aimed at providing meals to children from socially disadvantaged families during their stay in primary school.

National priorities in the fight against poverty generally follow the recommendations of the EU associated with the financial rationalization of the social protection system. It is missing a multi-sectoral approach - it seems that the fight against poverty and social exclusion is a reactive process seen only under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth.

What's missing

There is a lack of targeted measures and programmes that have a real potential to change the situation of particularly vulnerable groups - people with disabilities, the homeless, single parents, the long-term unemployed, and others.

CYPRUS***Positive Measures***

The introduction of the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) in July 2014. Although we had a very good system of public allowances through which about 22,000 beneficiaries (42,000 counting the members of their families) were covered, when they introduced the GMI, this allowance changed to GMI. The main positive change from the previous system was the right for working poor and long-term unemployed people to apply for this GMI. Unfortunately the set criteria are so strict that GMI cannot solve the long-term unemployed problem. E.g., by December 2014, 71.000 applications were received, 26.000 applications were examined and a final decision was taken only for about 12.000 of them. These figures show that a lot of people are excluded from this right and more and more people are living from social groceries (about 50,000 people and 13,000 children are receiving food from school).

Negative measures

The percentage of people-at-risk-of-poverty increased to 27.8%. The severe material deprivation rate increased to 16.1%. The jobless households rate also increased to 7.9%. The GMI, as it is, does not meet the needs of some vulnerable groups such as long-term unemployed. Immigrants and Roma also are completely excluded. In 2014, for the first time, the phenomena of homelessness appeared in Cyprus and people begging for food in the street. Unfortunately this phenomena will be increased after the measures that the Banks are taking for unpaid loans. Many households cannot afford to pay their loans and since there is not enough protection for those owning their first house, many families will be 'thrown out in the street' losing their homes. This policy will be implemented in August 2015.

What's missing

Adequate social policy (in services and allowances) to cover the new phenomena of poverty that the financial crises and the high rate of unemployment created. The only social measures taken are those funded by the European programmes and they cannot provide a comprehensive approach to the challenges faced. Also a migration policy is missing and though 25% of Cyprus' population are immigrants, poverty and exclusion of this vulnerable group cannot be avoided, on the contrary it is increasing day by day.

Fair taxation is needed in order to close the inequality gap and fight poverty and offer people a decent life.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Positive Measures

Lower taxation for families with children, more focus on quality services for children, introducing inclusive education legislation. The government claims that it will, in line with the national objective of combating poverty and social exclusion, support measures to contribute to the integration of socially excluded persons or those at risk of social exclusion into society, both through an inclusive labour market and by increasing the availability, quality and sustainability of basic resources and services, including decent income, housing and education. The government claims in the NRP that it will continue to fulfil the Social Inclusion Strategy 2014–2020, which covers the main areas of interest for social inclusion of socially excluded persons or those at risk of social exclusion. Also in February 2015 the government approved the Roma Integration Strategy 2014–2020. In both, there is a special emphasis on promoting social inclusion and social cohesion in structurally underdeveloped regions with higher unemployment and the incidence of socially excluded localities. A co-ordinated approach is ready to address socially excluded localities using European Structural and Investment Funds and professional support of the Agency for Social Inclusion (ASZ). Also under preparation is the intention of a law on social inclusion and a law on social entrepreneurship, which will be submitted to the government in late 2015. Due to forecasts of demographic development and population aging the government will support measures contained in the National Action Plan Promoting Positive Ageing for the Period of 2013–2017 (NAP). The main goal is to change people's and the whole society's attitudes to aging, improve the involvement of older people in society and promote active aging as a prevention of social exclusion and health problems. The government also claims that it will support the implementation of the Concept of Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Issues in the Czech Republic until 2020, which covers topics from promoting access to housing and health care to promoting awareness and cooperation of all relevant actors. The social housing system consists of the use of social services (the emergence of new social services, i.e. emergency housing), the state contributions to housing and the use of social or affordable housing (social work is always used in connection to social housing) but the law on social housing is still very unclear. Independent municipalities are not willing to fully cooperate with state and Labour offices in more sensitive social housing and other socially inclusive policies. The development of the National Strategy of Development of Social Services 2016-2020 is planned but the stable financing of the sector, especially social prevention services run by NGOs according to Law on Social services is still not clear and there are many changes that social service providers have to make.

Negative measures

The First National Consensus Conference on Homelessness in November 2014, and the publication of its output in April 2015, lacked openness and real participation, it was criticised by the Platform for Social Housing. Independent municipalities are not willing to fully cooperate with state and Labour offices in more sensitive social housing and other socially inclusive policies. The Act on Social Workers seems unnecessary, and it is criticised by many social NGOs

– as white collar rather than client oriented, it rather bureaucratically regulates terms and conditions of social work for all social workers, professional growth, career advancement and protection of professional degrees. A professional association of social workers will be created.

What's missing

The Concept of Social Housing in the Czech Republic 2015– 2025 seems good but it is not clear to what extent it will fit into the adoption of the law on social housing. The law should enter force on 1st January 2017. It is still not clear what it will look like. Currently CZ is facing problems with not granting housing subsidies to some people living in shelters and without provision of more suitable housing creating significant numbers of new homeless people. An interdepartmental working group on long-term health and social care was created, a draft of a comprehensive law on long-term care which amended the law on long-term care is being developed. The outcome is still unclear - more social and health interconnections in legislation and cooperation in between these sectors should be introduced.

DENMARK

Positive measures

The Danish NRP provides a good overview of the many projects the government set in motion to create social inclusion among disadvantaged children, the homeless, drug addicts, etc. FEANTSA: Homelessness is a clear priority. There is a specific target on reducing homelessness as part of 2020, the outcomes of the current strategy are being scaled up and there are plans for a new youth homelessness strategy.

Negative measures

Experience shows that such projects often work well, but cease when the government's financial support stop, typically after three to five years. There is no visible effect in the long term or at a broader national scale.

What's missing

Initiatives tackling gender gaps and discrimination against elderly.

ESTONIA

Positive measures

Raised working age with special measures. Increase of minimum tax to 154 euros from 1st of January.

What's missing

Nothing about homelessness and housing exclusion; nothing about the gender gap.

FRANCE

Positive measures

The creation of the commitment to “ meet or implement rights”: to fight against non-take-up, attempts regarding youth guarantee, the expected reinforced support for long-term unemployed people, the wish to increase access to the health system, increase of minimum income (Revenu de Solidarité Active) even if too low according to EAPN France.

Negative measures

The risk of decreasing housing State Aid, in the line of specific recommendations made by the European Commission to France, is very worrying and could diminish the impact of other positive measures.

What's missing

It is particularly necessary to be able to increase as necessary national credits for the training of long-term unemployed people to increase their chance to get a new job. Regarding housing policy, it is fundamental to have a financial plan over the next 5 years to be able to have visibility on the evolution of social housing in the medium term.

GERMANY***Positive measures***

Some projects were established, mostly funded by ESF. Most of their concepts involve an orientation to social space. For example: "Jugend und Quartier" (Youth and district)

"Soziale Teilhabe am Arbeitsmarkt" (Social participation at the labour market). FEANTSA: Measures to address homelessness, including amongst EU citizens having exercised their right to free movement.

Negative measures

Only projects which are funded by ESF are positive developments.

What's missing

There is no effective and integrated strategy. There are no integrated strategies for all groups. Child poverty and homelessness are not even mentioned.

HUNGARY***Positive measures***

Emphasis on improvement of quality of life of Roma people, especially Roma women; emphasis on reducing children's malnutrition and hunger;

Developing support networks by supporting task reconciliation and workplace (improving nursery's and kindergarten's capacity); integrated child programmes.

Negative measures

There is no reflection on different at risk groups, like people with disabilities, old people, homeless people, ethnic minorities (except Roma people), migrants (not mentioning the horrible government-campaign against them). The public work scheme is treated as a universal remedy for all problems concerning poverty and social exclusion.

What's missing

Streamlined, coordinated policy measures, capable of significantly reducing poverty.

IRELAND***Positive measures***

While the main social welfare rates remained unchanged in Budget 2015 there has been a partial reversal of some previous cuts to child benefit, the additional 'Christmas payment', an increase in the Living Alone Allowance for older people as well as the introduction of a new Back to Work Family Dividend. FEANTSA: Homeless people targeted in Dublin with introduction of the Homelessness Action Plan.

Negative measures

Poverty levels are still increasing and while the NRP names Active Inclusion as the framework for its response in addressing poverty, the main focus is really still on access to the labour market.

What's missing

While highlighting a number of areas related to welfare reform the NRP does not address the issue of income adequacy. Social welfare supports are only mentioned in the context of the incentive to work or in-work supports. Adequacy of income for those outside of employment temporarily or permanently e.g. due to unemployment, disability, illness, age or due to caring responsibilities is not addressed generally.

LATVIA***Positive measures***

The Country-specific Recommendation No 3 was important requiring adequacy of benefits, support into work, reducing the tax wedge for low income earners. However the proposals are insufficient to deal with drastic drops in income, particularly when the main message is keeping to the austerity reform agenda.

Negative measures

Social services reform in their 'improved task requirement' list is increasing obstacles to take up benefits, as people feel humiliated to go through the procedure. Some institutions are asking people to apply for reimbursement for overpaid tax or other benefits, which are established by law and should be paid automatically.

LUXEMBOURG***Positive measures***

Reform of the Social Offices with the introduction of the Third payer for health costs, and the youth guarantee.

Negative measures

Budgetary cuts in social services and benefits e.g. abolishing the education allowance or reducing mobility and reinsertion credits in the unemployment benefit...

What's missing

A decisive and concrete action in the housing field.

MALTA***Positive measures***

There are programmes designed to help children. Vocational training.

Negative measures

The protection of the commercial housing market to the detriment of social housing.

What's missing

Social housing policy, more care institutions for the elderly, programme for better inclusion policies of irregular migrants.

NETHERLANDS***Positive measures***

100 million € per year extra money to tackle poverty, extra attention for child poverty; extra schemes and attention for youth unemployment; extra attention to early school leaving; EAPN NL has to be fair and state that NL still has several additions to minimum income, but we see the decrease of the rent supply and the change in the supply measurements for children not as a positive change. Action(s) taken against this change were successful and made it less drastic.

Negative measures

No decent raise of the lowest wages and minimum income (social assistance); More people need two jobs to survive; the amount of working hours per week is decreasing to 24 per person in a job. In-work poverty is increasing. Unemployment benefit was a good benefit previously which people received for 5 years, depending how long they had worked. Now it's been reduced to 3 and then to 2 years. Debts have also increased. Costs are very high when people try to pay back debts, with high interest rates. If you don't pay your rent, you get increased costs with interest. With the new law you have to do something to receive benefits, like obligatory volunteer work. But does it mean work? If you aren't paid? People are also leaving jobs, and then coming back to the same job on a lower pay.

What's missing

In our opinion, an overall vision for the development of a social and income-fair society. Ambitions of the government are to have 80% participation on the Labour market and to spend more money on R&D. But under which conditions? Poverty increased by 0.9%.

POLAND

Positive measures

Under the youth guarantee programme there are measures for young people with disabilities, NEETs, foster care leavers, correctional institution leavers (one priority for young people with severe problems); Universal right to childcare for pre-school children (3 and 4 year olds). New legislative proposals in family benefits which could have at least short-term poverty reduction consequences; One new government program for seniors which is based on day centres and services provided there; Another programme supporting employment of older workers (50+); Personalized services for people with disabilities and training for employers.

What's missing

Any mention of Social Investment Package and children as an at-risk group.

Total absence of proposals for housing and homelessness.

PORTUGAL

Positive measures

The measure related to the extension of unemployment protection to other professional categories, like independent workers economically dependent, business owners, members of statutory bodies of legal persons with management functions; the increase of unemployment benefit for households where both parents are unemployed or single parents, with children; the adoption of 20% of structural funds to fight poverty and social exclusion. FEANTSA: Homelessness is also mentioned as a priority.

Negative measures

Even taking into consideration that the financial crisis had an impact on poverty and social exclusion at national level, there are no specific measures to deal with this situation. With some exceptions, measures presented have a strong relation to the labour market but this is just one side of the problem. In the same way, the absence of measures to deal with specific poverty subjects in which Portugal has negative results in the scope of Europe, like child poverty is quite negative.

What's missing

Orientations for the implementation of a National Strategy to Fight Poverty and Social Exclusion. Just as it was described in CSR assessment, there is a "silence" in relation to the need for a birth

/ family policy. Ageing is a reality at national level and in the scope of Europe. The negative birth rate, as well as the increase in ageing rate (and also the negative migration balance) will have (and is already having) an impact on social security sustainability, as well as the labour market and health.

SPAIN

Positive measures

Good participation/engagement of the Children Rights NGOs, EAPN and other platforms. More presence of children's issues in the political arena. There was a lot of participation, in particular, with regard the Comprehensive Plan on Family Support, which was adopted soon after the NRP. New legal framework for adoption and foster care, which was necessary. FEANTSA: A new homelessness strategy is being prepared.

Negative measures

The budget reflects already existing measures (no new money). No considerable impact.

In July 2014 there was an improvised distribution of 17 million Euro among the Autonomous Communities, which was quite controversial and EAPN Spain did a position paper on the matter. We stated that, in the same manner as required for social organisations, these funds should be administered according to a logical framework, identifying and pursuing aims and objectives, to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness, and to prevent these funds from being just a set of disjointed disparate actions. Although there is 20% in the budget for this action line, many of the measures contained in the Comprehensive Plan on Family Support are not new.

What's missing

The Alliance against Child Poverty, led by UNICEF with the participation of many NGOs and Platforms including EAPN Spain, proposed a Pact against Child Poverty, including child benefits. This was also a demand within EAPN's proposals to the electoral candidates, in the regional elections of May 2015. The Comprehensive Plan on Family Support is not the solution for child poverty and social exclusion, although there are measures which could be useful. However, it's a "Plan" (as in the case of PENIA) and not really binding for the Autonomous Regions, who have social competences transferred and are responsible for these issues.

SWEDEN

Positive measures

Good ambitions but a lack of concrete measures.

UNITED KINGDOM/SCOTLAND

Positive measures

The last Coalition government and the current Conservative majority government would emphasise the focus on paid work as a route out of poverty. This includes Job Centre Plus and the Work Programme for the longer term unemployed and those with more barriers to employment. They would also emphasise work incentives including through increased personal allowances and the new benefits' structure, Universal Credit, still in course of implementation. The government refers also in the NRP 2015 to the Troubled Families' programme of more intensive intervention for families in chaotic circumstances. This programme is being extended. However, it is more difficult for social NGOs to be positive about what had the potential to be much more beneficial interventions, because the Work Programme is punitive and damaging to human rights and dignity especially of more vulnerable clients. Work incentives have been damaged by cuts that affect the taper rate as people move between benefits and work, and cuts to local support services. Increases in personal tax allowances do not benefit the poorest.

FEANTSA: Scottish and Welsh measures are proposed to address homelessness, despite unfavourable welfare context.

Negative measures

The overall approach to welfare 'reform', its misleading 'austerity' context of severe cuts and the wholly unjust distributional effects on people of working age, women, children and people with a disability is worse than negative. It is a disaster for social cohesion. The UK is a much more divisive place now, personally, geographically, regionally, by work status, than it was before 2010, though the process started before that. Yet government will cut again and deeper in this Parliament and again focus on poorer people of working age including those in paid work. There is a punitive regime and a lack of transparency and local and client accountability of Work Programme providers (and most clients have no choice of provider, despite the government's preference for 'choice' in other policy areas); There is a negative and misleading media environment, including from government, about people out of work. This prolonged and sustained campaign of vilification has had a significant effect on public opinion at a time when many people on moderate incomes just above the poverty line are in straitened circumstances and confronting low and stagnant pay. This media environment and its impact was discussed in the UK EMIN Report of December 2014.

What's missing

- The 'facts' about the welfare 'reforms' and cuts – Who bears them? How long they have an impact? What harm is done? Who benefits? When it will stop?, Whether any will be restored?
- An integrated plan to address the worsening circumstances of young people. They have much lower wages, are excluded from the new increase in the minimum wage, worse working conditions, much poorer access to welfare benefits and much poorer access than older people to both social and private housing and to opportunities for a sustainable future and capacity to build their own lives, families and careers in their own homes.

Benchmarking Iceland

As a benchmarking exercise, a comparison is made with Iceland. Only 2% live in extreme poverty. But there has been a decline in material deprivation of families with children, (the subject of the focus of Welfare Watch) i.e. with 2.9% less people having difficulties to make ends meet, whilst the at risk of poverty rate fell by 2.2% and the materially deprived rate by 0.6%.

Positive measures

The Welfare Watch Platform was reactivated. Better migrant policy – shorter waiting periods and accepting more people. Plans to increase the availability of smaller, cheaper apartments. Harm reduction projects. Decrease in gender pay gap from 19.9% to 18.3% - much higher in private than in public sector.

Negative measures

Higher costs in the health care system. The unadjusted gender pay gap. In 2014 just under one third of children did not partake in organized leisure, an increase from 14.3% in 2009. Raising VAT on food, which hits poorer families. The disability benefits have not been able to keep up with price increases, general wage increase nor the lowest wages, and the difference is huge.

Key Concerns

Low profile and slow progress on the poverty target

Despite the guidelines, not all NRPs provide a **specific section** dedicated to progress on the poverty target, and the policies to deliver it (HR). Where they are quoted, **progress is uneven and controversial**. A few highlight overall progress in the At Risk of Poverty and/or Exclusion (ARPE) overall EU indicator (BE, HU, PL). However, the complexity of the aggregate, composite indicators undermines the real impact. Mainly there are **increases/decreases in different indicators** e.g. in Finland there is a fall in deprivation but increase in jobless households. In the case of **Poland and the Czech Republic the targets have been achieved**. In Poland, the national target of 1.5 million from 11.5 million was achieved in 2013, mainly through a decline in severe material deprivation. EAPN asked in its negotiations with the government for a new goal and sub-targets, but the government rejected this and agreed only to a new annual analytical report on poverty. In the Czech Republic, the government achieved its target of 30.000 mainly through the reduction in the relative poverty indicator from 9.6% to 8.6%, however severe material deprivation remains unchanged at 6.6%. The government has set a new, but still rather unchallenging, target of 100.000 reduction. **More members highlight increases in poverty** (CY, DK, FI, IE, LU, MT, PT, ES). In the case of Portugal rising to 27.5%, and in Spain from 27.3% to 29.2% with a reduction in average income of 2.3%.

Several MS still fail to use EU indicators (e.g. DE, SE and UK). In Sweden and Germany unemployment and long-term unemployment indicators are used rather than any poverty indicator; whilst in the UK no poverty target is set, only a reference to the legal child poverty target enshrined in the Child Poverty Act 2010, which the new government will remove. Ireland has 2 poverty targets, one for national and one for EU level. The reference EU indicator is 'combined poverty' (either consistent poverty, at risk of poverty or basic deprivation) and this has increased from 35.7% in 2012 to 37.5% in 2013. However Ireland also set a **new sub-target on child poverty**: to lift 70.000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020 i.e. a reduction of 2/3 on the 2011 baseline. In Luxembourg, it is clear to the Government that the measures put in place will not be sufficient to reach the poverty target, but no further action is taken as a consequence.

Work-first approaches to poverty dominant in a patchwork of approaches

The NRPs reflect a **myriad of different approaches, lacking an overall systematic, integrated strategy**. Stronger examples of integrated strategies include CZ, FR, IE, ES (see next section). In Portugal, the NRP highlights the importance of the Social Emergency Programme to deal with poverty issues and the adoption of 20% of ESF to fight poverty. However the Social Emergency program is not a national strategy to fight poverty. In many NRPs, **work is seen as the most important route out of poverty** (EE, DE, HU, PT, ES, SE and UK), despite the rise in in-work poverty to 8.7% (2013) with a peak of 10.1% in Luxembourg (however this rate rises to 22.1% for Portuguese workers!), or as in UK where the majority of people in poverty have a job. Some countries emphasize the need to provide more support for low paid workers and to avoid the poverty trap of transition from benefits to low-paid work (FI, IE), or to increase minimum wages (PT).

Increasing participation in the labour market however is mainly about Activation and removing disincentives to work (BE, DK, PT,) as well as restricting access to early retirement. Public work-fare schemes are also worryingly in evidence (HU) where unemployed people are forced into compulsory public work, receiving only minimum benefits. Key target groups are women (HU, MT) especially lone parents (LU); Roma and Disabled (UK) as well as youth (EE, NL).

Other MS focus more centrally on issues of **social protection and the sustainability** of social protection systems, (BE, HR, FI, FR, PL, PT). There is a split between those with an explicit focus on reducing costs (HR, UK), and those who consider adequacy and accessibility (BE, EE, FI, FR, PT, ES), although cost-cutting is an underlying driver in all. There is also more evidence of education as a key focus. This is partly to get more people into work (DK, DE, ES), but also an increased interest in early learning and providing in-kind benefits to support children in schools (CZ, EE, HU). Often, the focus on specific target groups seems very ad hoc, with no clear evidence base justifying the priority, i.e. in Croatia where the only groups focussed on are parents and children with low level of education, students and disabled people.

Missing implementation of Integrated Active Inclusion Strategies

A clear requirement in the Guidance note on the NRP is delivery **on Active Inclusion**, also based on the implementation of the Social Investment Package. EAPN considers that an **integrated Active Inclusion approach (access to adequate minimum income, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services)** is a major pre-requisite as part of an integrated multidimensional anti-poverty strategy. Although some evidence of a strategy is seen in a minority of countries (HR, CZ, FR, IE, ES), the majority highlight no signs of implementation. Only Ireland highlights an **explicit focus on Active inclusion with the 3 pillars**, however this is not then further developed in detail. In Spain's case there is a clear section on fighting poverty and social exclusion with several national strategies (National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, Youth Strategy and action Plan, Disability, Drugs, Roma, Children and Adolescents). In the Czech Republic, the government claims to make the strategy a priority and that the National Social Inclusion Strategy will be implemented, together with a new Roma Inclusion Strategy. The approach is through inclusive labour market, access to decent income, housing and education, but the implementation is not clear. In France, a Multiannual Strategy and Plan for combating poverty and social exclusion is in place, also in Croatia. However an explicit budget to implement the plans/strategies is not always evident. In some cases, where Member States have a strategy, it is not mentioned in the NRP (FI) In some cases there is an awareness of the need for strategy but nothing concrete is proposed (SE).

Mainly, however, **Active Inclusion is narrowly interpreted as 'activation'** only, rather than promoting an integrated approach with all 3 pillars. In the UK, the main objective of activation is to increase labour force participation rates whilst cutting expenditure on welfare benefits through increased punitive conditionality (BE, DK). In Ireland, a specific focus on lone parents is clearly linked to reducing dependency on benefits. However, an integrated approach is missing, which undermines the effective impact on poverty. **Some positive examples** are given of steps to improve personalized support to some groups who are distant from the labour market (BE, FR, IE, LU, MT, PL, UK), for example for the disabled, migrants and unemployed in Wallonia/Belgium, or measures for youth in Poland – with disabilities, NEETs, foster care leavers- but concern is raised about the impact of increasing conditionality. (For more information on activation see employment section).

Uneven support for adequate minimum income undermining living standards

Given the major **role of social protection in reducing poverty** (35% EU average and up to 63% In Ireland), the failure to reinforce minimum income and other income support is a major barrier to progress on poverty reduction through supporting household income as a basis for recovery. Several responses highlight disturbing measures that **reduce minimum income** and other basic benefits, at a time when poverty continues to rise in more than a 1/3 of countries (DK, EE, IE, UK). In some cases this is done by freezing benefits (FI, UK). For example, in the UK all major working age benefits levels are frozen, also setting a cap on the total amount of benefits received

by a household. Minimum benefits for asylum seekers are also in place with the new government aiming to re-negotiate EU rules on migrants' benefits. The strategy of reducing benefits combined with conditionality to 'reduce disincentives to work' is being followed in many countries and appears to aim to 'force' people off benefits and into jobs, but without ensuring access to quality jobs, whilst undermining living standards for people without work. In the UK, employment support with employers for disabled people has been cut, at the same time as disability benefits reduced with more stringent work capability tests, with a clear objective of cutting benefit budgets, at the expense of the working-age poor.

In some countries, more positive efforts have been made to strengthen **coverage and adequacy of social assistance**, although concrete results are not seen yet (BE, CY, FR, NL, PL, PT, SE). In Belgium, Minimum Income is expected to be raised to approach the poverty threshold (although a new way of calculating the income of people will be used, taking into account more/other social advantages, benefits..., which might result in maintaining the status quo or even worst case scenarios for lower incomes); whilst in Sweden a full index increase (1.1%) was made to the basic minimum income, compared to other benefits. In Portugal, although the aim is to improve coverage, actual amounts have decreased and there are more restricted conditions to access it; whilst in Poland the agreed proposal to reform minimum income, as part of the anti-poverty strategy delivering on the ex-ante conditionality for ESF, has been blocked by the Minister of Finance, quoting EU guidance through the CSRs. In others, the focus is on **improving unemployment benefit**, extending it to more categories (PT) or increased levels for specific periods (PT, SE). In Portugal's case the increase is focused on families where both parents are unemployed or single parents, with children, however 47.9% (September 2014) are still unprotected (by unemployment protection or by Social Insertion Income).

Concern over family/child poverty receive a renewed focus, with the double objective of getting women into work and reducing children's hardship, but the **overall impact on income levels is unclear** within the balance of benefit support (EE, PL, PT). Making work pay by tackling tapering and support to transitions, is a welcome development (IE, SE). In Ireland, there is a new Back to Work Family Dividend, which provides in-work support.

In Sweden, the Social Assistance Act has been amended so that 25% of earnings are not taken into account as income during the first two years with work and salary, if you receive social assistance. In Poland, a new family benefit is promoted for new mothers not covered by sickness insurance; whilst in Portugal, family allowance is under a new rule specifying the procedure to annually assess the household income. However the Commission's Country report had highlighted that 1 in 3 families have actually lost access to child benefits in the last period. The overall, combined impact of the various changes needs to be transparently monitored to ensure that they result in better income and living standards.

Services viewed too often as a cost not a benefit

In general, the focus on ensuring **access to quality and affordable services** as part of social protection systems, is absent from the sections related to poverty and social inclusion in the NRP. Instead, key services like health, education, social services are quoted in the macroeconomic chapters regarding 'modernizing' systems, with a view to cutting budgets as part of deficit reduction. This approach views services as a cost not a benefit (see macroeconomic section). Where **access to services** is mentioned, it is most often around **education** (HR, CZ, EE, FR), but often restricted to specific groups (i.e. low income and disabled), rather than a comprehensive approach for all groups and across the life cycle. **Social Services** are mentioned with ad hoc approaches, underlining programmes with different groups, but without underlining their role in integrated approaches to fighting poverty (DK).

Major concerns are raised by members around the lack of focus on access to **affordable universal health** care, e.g. Germany where health insurance is restricted to those who have a job or get minimum income, with others only getting emergency supply.

Affordable housing is the other major concern, with the main focus on supporting the housing market and increasing housing supply rather than ensuring affordable homes. Investment in social housing is only highlighted by CZ, IE and PT. In Ireland, access has been increased in response to very high demand that is due to the failure of other policies and to address a chronic undersupply created by under-investment and selling off social housing. In the Czech Republic, the government claims it will promote access to housing including through social housing but the law on social housing is still very unclear. In Croatia, social housing projects are planned as public/private partnership but with unclear funding. In the UK, with the primary focus on supporting the market, no mention is made of social housing, although in the devolved administrations there is more support. For example, in Scotland, there is a subsidy for house-building and direct build of local authority houses, whilst in Northern Ireland, there is investment in more housing for the most vulnerable. Wales is tackling inequalities in access to housing for gypsies/travellers. **Access to utilities and transport** is also underlined. In Portugal, there is an increase in energy and transport social tariffs to reduce material deprivation, but the overall question of systematic approaches to tackle energy poverty is absent.

Some progress on Investing in Children, but not integrated, rights-based approaches

Members looked for signs of the implementation of the integrated approach to Investing in Children⁴ to fight child poverty and promote child well-being. Whilst there are encouraging signs of **new more integrated plans** (BE, IE, ES) the commitment to delivery is undermined by budget restrictions. In Belgium, there is a new National plan to fight child poverty (BE) and Action Plan (Wallonia); whilst in Ireland, a new – national framework: Better Outcomes, Brighter Future, which focuses on child poverty, prevention, early intervention, school meals, sports and culture. In Spain, the strategic plan for children and adolescents (PENIA) (2013-2016) is being implemented. There is also a new legislative reform to streamline processes for foster care and adoption and improve care of children at risk. However, the budget reflects already existing measures, with no new money and the implementation depends on regional authorities, raising doubts about the integrated approach. **A positive aspect is that all these initiatives have actively involved stakeholders.** However, it is particularly worrying that countries with the **highest levels of child poverty often make no reference** to it in their NRP e.g. PT, which has the largest increase in child poverty (31.7% in 2013).

Access to early learning and childcare, is seen as a growing priority (BE, CZ, NL, PL, UK). This includes creating more places for childcare (BE) or increasing tax deductions for families, including for childcare (CZ). In Poland, is underpinned by a universal right for pre-school children (3-4). However, the issue of affordability and quality remain. In LU, possibilities are explored to offer free early childhood education and care for 1 to 4 year old children during the normal school hours, combined with an early informal language training. In the UK, more help is given with costs for low-paid parents, but still leaving it as one of most expensive services in EU. The objective is more focussed on childcare to enable women to work, rather than quality early-learning and the needs and rights of the child. Part-time early years care is proposed from age 2 for disadvantaged children and from age 3 for others, but with no discussion on quality or access.

Increasing family/child income is welcomed in several countries, with increases in child and family benefits (BE, EE, IE, SE) and increased monitoring. Ireland points out that this is after years of cuts. Whilst other members highlight an increased focus on **in-kind benefits** within the

⁴ EC Recommendation: Investing in Children.

education systems, particularly free or subsidized books and meals (EE, HU, UK) or free hours (LU). In terms of specific groups, Roma children are given specific attention e.g. in Hungary, with a focus on reducing malnutrition and improvement of quality of life, and integrated child programmes.

Insufficient response to Homelessness Crisis

Rising homelessness is seen by many members as a key unmet priority, in the context of shrinking incomes and supply of affordable housing. Whilst several members highlight plans on homelessness (BE, CZ, IE, LU, PT, SE, with ES being finalized) **doubts are raised about financing and the implementation** process. In Luxembourg, there is a national strategy against homelessness, but there is no implementation plan. In Ireland, the government agreed an implementation plan on the State's response to homelessness and the Social Housing strategy, highlighting an additional 2.2 bn Euros, with plans to address the needs of 90.000 households on the waiting list and street homeless. However, NGOs highlight that this is only the tip of the iceberg to develop a sustainable strategy. In Belgium, there is a plan for cooperation on homelessness between federal government/and regions together with a Housing First and partnership strategy, including coordination for emergency intake during the winter and programmes to ensure access to housing and accompaniment, but this depends on regional implementation. A similar situation arises in Sweden. In Portugal, although a national strategy exists, its future implementation is uncertain i.e. there is no information about it, perhaps due to budget restraints. In the Czech Republic, the government has signalled its intentions of tackling homelessness, but problems around implementation exist. The First National Consensus Conference on Homelessness held in November 2014 was criticised by the Platform for Social Housing for lacking openness and participation. Currently some municipalities are failing to grant housing subsidies to some people living in shelters or to provide more suitable housing which is creating significant numbers of new homeless people. In some cases the **NRP fails to mention the strategy that exists**, i.e. in Finland where the government has a programme to decrease long-term homelessness and is developing a Housing First programme. In other countries, suffering a notable housing and homelessness crisis, the absence of a strategy or any explicit measures is noted (CY, DE, HU, MT, UK). In the UK, there is no mention of a homelessness strategy.

Some increased focus on Gender and Roma, but low priority to migrants and other groups

The selection of target groups for antidiscrimination and support action is seen by most members to be piecemeal, and not based on current data and evidence related to which groups face the greatest risk of poverty and exclusion. The main priority is **supporting the promotion of gender equality in the labour market**, e.g. in PT, providing financial support to hiring unemployed people who are under-represented in respect of their gender in a specific occupation. This translates into a focus on increasing **participation of women** in the labour market in most EU countries. However strategies to challenge the gender pay gap are notably absent. In Spain, there is an important measure to reduce the gender gap in pensions which impacts on women, from the current 38% to 26% by 2016, by recognizing the role of women with at least 2 children with a % increase. Other measures include breastfeeding rights, and changes in social security rights for self-employed women are also being prepared. Increasing the **employment rate of Roma women**, is also a focus in some countries, e.g. in Hungary, through supporting reconciliation of family and work tasks and the improvement of voluntary cooperation of Roma women in social and public life. In the Czech Republic, a new Roma Integration Strategy (2014-20) has been approved, with particular emphasis on poorer regions. However, **much less focus is given to other at-risk groups** particularly people with disabilities,

older people, ethnic minorities and most obviously migrants, including undocumented migrants in desperate humanitarian need (IT and ES).

Support to people with **disability is mainly through increasing access to the labour market, rather than supporting social integration and inclusion** (MT, PL, UK). In Poland, this positively includes offering personalized support, as well as training to employers. However, less support is given to people with mental disabilities or health problems (MT). Support for older people and the adequacy of pensions and need for long-term care, is notably absent (MT). **Migrants continue to be ignored as a key group facing poverty** and exclusion, even in countries with major challenges around immigration. In Hungary, the government is pursuing an active campaign against them. Even in countries with well-developed strategies to support key minority groups – e.g. in Spain, there is a deafening silence on access to rights for migrants and the fight against poverty, particularly undocumented migrants. However, a major reverse has been won by NGOs defending the right to healthcare for undocumented migrants, which was undermined by the government's Royal Decree of 2012.

Key Messages

1. Take the poverty target seriously!

All Member States should adopt ambitious national targets using all 3 EU indicators, and transparently monitor their progress together with stakeholders.

2. Prioritize an ambitious, integrated anti-poverty strategy for all groups

Put in place an overarching multidimensional strategy to fight poverty for all groups, based on rights and access to quality jobs, social protection and services. This should provide the basis for thematic strategies, implementing priorities of the Social Investment Package – on tackling homelessness, investing in Children and Roma inclusion. New priority must be given to tackling exclusion of migrants.

3. Invest in an adequate income through the life cycle

Investment in adequate minimum income and social protection is key to provide a strong foundation for a sustainable recovery and investment in people approach. The EU should make progress on supporting a framework to ensure quality social standards and a right to an adequate income through the life cycle.

4. Employment

Introduction

As indicated in the Guidance Note for the preparation of the NRPs, the Employment part of the National Reform Programmes is dedicated to efforts to reach the employment target of the Europe 2020 Strategy – 75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed. However, this objective, subsequently translated in the national targets, is purely numerical, and does not take into account a number of factors, such as whether the activation process is a supportive one, or whether the jobs accessed are of quality, sustainable, and effectively take people out of poverty. This contradicts the explicit provision for “promoting job quality” of Guideline 8 of the Integrated Guidelines, which are supposed to underpin the Europe 2020 Strategy and its delivery. The Annual Growth Survey no longer includes a priority on Tackling Unemployment and the Social Consequences of the Crisis, as it did in previous years, which means that the social dimension, including employment, has been given less attention overall. However, some welcome elements come from the Joint Employment Report, regarding quality of work and employment – however, these references are weak, not mainstreamed, and undermined by a lack of investment in job creation, a continuing trend of negative, compulsive activation, and negative macroeconomic policies with a damaging impact on job quality and security.

This chapter explores the policies that Governments put forward in their National Reform Programmes in order to reach the employment target, and whether they amount to more than a numbers’ game. Building on the analysis carried out by our national members, the section shows that more and better efforts are needed in order to implement holistic strategies for social inclusion and professional integration.

Positive, negative, missing measures in Employment Policies of the NRP

BELGIUM

Positive measures

Some fiscal changes for low wages are positive, but weaker than other more negative measures. Some meaningful activation trajectories for vulnerable people are put in place in the regions, but the impact is too weak, given the lack of accessible quality jobs for those people, and the huge discrimination in the labour market.

Negative measures

The so-called modernization (read: destruction) of wage indexation systems. The part-time unemployed will receive less (no) unemployment benefits. Further decrease of long-term unemployed benefits (e.g. for the elderly long-term unemployed). Benefits for young unemployed people are abolished, which makes them dependent on minimum income, but even that is not accessible for a lot of young people.

What’s missing

Decent social protection systems that invest in vulnerable people and make them stronger. Quality sustainable job creation. Real effective measures against discrimination in the labour market.

CROATIA

Positive measures

In order to strengthen the effectiveness and scope of active labour market policies, the Guidelines for Development and Implementation of the Active Labour Market Policy in the Republic of Croatia for the period from 2015 to 2017 were adopted. Implementation of the external evaluation of the previous cycle of active labour market measures implemented by the Croatian Employment Service in 2010 has commenced. The aim of the project entitled 'External evaluation of the active labour market policy measures' is to determine the actual effectiveness of active labour market policies and determine if the intervention achieved its goal of developing an evidence-based and economically rational approach in relation to the invested funds, and to provide a basis for further planning.

Negative measures

Croatia is facing worsening labour market conditions due to the protracted crisis with continued lack of job creation and severely under-utilised labour market potential. Unemployment rate is around 18,4% (April 2015) with over 52% of unemployed young people. The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training is also increasing; it reached 18.6 % in 2013.

What's missing

The Croatian Employers' Association, which participated in a conference organized by EAPN Croatia in June 2015, highlights the needs for better business conditions. The problem lies in the frequent changes of the legal framework. For EAPN Croatia, it is notable that activities in this field of the Employment Policies should be in accordance with the current socio-demographic trends, assuming economic growth, positive trends of the labour market and assurance of the conditions for opening new jobs, creation of measures aimed at long-term unemployed persons and other vulnerable groups (youth, persons with disabilities, the Roma people, homeless people). More efforts should be invested into increasing adequacy of educational system and labour market.

CYPRUS

Positive measures

The employment rate was 67.6% in 2014 and the unemployment rate was 16.1%. The unemployment among young people (age group 15-24 years) rose dramatically to 38.9% in 2013 and fell to 35.9% in 2014. This happened mainly for two reasons. The first reason is the special projects for youth employment for six months with a payment of 500 euros per month and the second reason is emigration. In 2014, 2.500 people were forced to migrate in order to find jobs and also those who finish their studies abroad do not return.

Negative measures

In order to fight unemployment they create flexible, precarious jobs without fixed conditions and benefits. On the one hand, long-term unemployed people and young people feel alright about having even a low wage, on the other hand the exploitation, fear and uncertainty of working people is increasing. Collective agreements, negotiations, industrial and labour relations are collapsing. The result is more and more insecure jobs, increase of working poor and reduction in decent and fixed-terms jobs. Under these conditions, the threat of unemployment and of losing their jobs, gender equality in employment and the struggle against discrimination are becoming more and more difficult to implement. In Cyprus, we have a minimum wage that covers nine professions which are mainly female-dominated and low paid. The last increase in this minimum wage was in 2012.

What's missing

What is missing is the political will to protect the working class and the benefits they gained throughout these years, especially in this crucial period. On the contrary, there is an organised effort (government and employers) to dissolve the trade unions, the collective agreements and collective bargaining.

There is no development and that means no projects, no job creation and of course no decent jobs. The government should invest in development that will affect the whole society and working people and not capital and rich people. Austerity measures and cuts in social services are increasing poverty and social problems and of course, it is not the right way for a fair and social Europe. People ask for a decent life, not to beg for a job and food.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Positive measures

Reform and more workers in Labour Offices, development and support towards case management approach – also to some extent (could be more) with the social NGO sector. Wider active employment policies put in practice by Labour Markets, with increase of minimum wage.

Negative measures

Rather cynical culture towards gender equality, low support of this issue generally, still high employment in hidden economy, over-indebtedness connected with unemployment - wages, household benefits calculated on the basis of “jointly considered persons” and lack of housing is demotivating young people from finding jobs. The governmental programme for *Work Placements for Young People under 30* is aimed at young people but specialised education programmes for low/non-educated youngsters are missing. Some social NGOs criticize requirements put in place regarding qualification of children’s groups’ personnel: they are too strict and in some regions even social NGOs do not fit the new standards.

What's missing

Focus on quality jobs creation, more focus on vulnerable youth support and adaptations, innovations in active employment policies specifically designed for 15+, 18+ youth.

DENMARK

Positive measures

The government has sought to address two major obstacles against job inclusion. First, a law designed to ensure comprehensive counselling and rehabilitation, secondly expanded opportunities for so-called flexi-jobs where disabled citizens gets the salary partly from the employer and partly as a compensation from the public authorities.

Negative measures

The results in jobs are very small.

What's missing

More specialized rehabilitation in relation to people with complex needs, but also many more jobs, adapted to socially excluded persons.

ESTONIA

Positive measures

- Attention to unemployed young people,
- More measures for helping older people return to the labour market (for those who wish to work),

- Support access to employment aimed at people with reduced capacity for work and people with disabilities,
- Youth Guarantee implementation started in 2015,
- Disability Reform (working reform) is delayed in order to involve target group.

Negative measures

Nothing about homelessness.

What's missing

Nothing on integrated services.

FINLAND

Positive measures

Youth Guarantee, even if there have been problems to fulfil it properly.

Negative measures

Pension reform, which raises the retirement age and decreases coming pensions.

What's missing

Ideas and resources to reduce long-term unemployment.

GERMANY

Positive measures

Germany has committed itself to the following national indicators:

- Employment rate for the group between 20 and 64: 77%,
- Employment rate for the group between 55 und 64: 60%,
- Employment rate for women: 73%,
- Reducing the number of long-term unemployed people until 2020 by 20% (since 2008).

All three goals were achieved by Germany.

Two programmes for publicly funded employment for maximum of 43.000 long-term unemployed started in 2015. Especially the programme "Soziale Teilhabe" (social participation) is an important signal. But in contrast there are one million long-term unemployed in Germany and studies show that at least 480.000 of them have no chance of getting a job again. Extensive and long-term measures and publicly funded employment must be provided not as a short-term programme for a few years but as constant measures for those who need them.

Negative measures

There is still a big number of long-term unemployed people (three million, half of them have children and live together with them in a "need community"). Others have (multiple) disabilities and all of them cannot manage to get into the first labour market. This is not mentioned in the NRP. Although the fall of the absolute number of unemployment is positive, it is not consistent with the goal of reducing the at-risk-of-poverty-rate in Germany. The at-risk-of-poverty-rate has been increasing since 2006 to 15.5% (with fluctuations 2010 and 2012). 12.5 million people are affected by income poverty this year. There are almost no measures to help them get out of their isolated situation. Existing programmes focus on employability – what is needed is a step before this phase.

What's missing

An effective and integrated strategy with the comprehension of the situation of the unemployed. And a statutory, negotiated and long-term strategy to fight unemployment, where only programmes exist. And again the reduction of poverty is only measured by the long-term unemployment indicator.

HUNGARY

Positive measures

- Youth are a key target group-and the youth unemployment rate is lower than the EU-average,
- Strengthening the training elements of employment programmes.

Negative measures

- Quality job creation is not an issue (green or social jobs are not even mentioned in the Employment Chapter of NRP 2015),
- In-work poverty is rising, it is also not mentioned in the document,
- The new Labour Code is minimising employment rights (the government has a different opinion), so we can't speak about any kind of improvement in this case
- Personalised pathways are also missing from the document,
- There is also not enough attention paid to at-risk groups, except youth,
- The public work scheme is over- prioritised.

What's missing

- The will to re-orientate the budget resources allocated to the public work scheme to active labour market measures despite the CSR,
- Improvement of adequacy of unemployment benefit and social assistance.

IRELAND

Positive measures

The expansion of the Pathways to Work strategy to address the needs of long-term workers is positive. Also welcome, but not mentioned in the NRP, is the piloting of supports for people on a Disability Allowance. EAPN Ireland has been calling for some time for the ending of the exclusionary approach of the national employment service of only providing supports to those newly registered as unemployed. However, we continue to have concerns that Intreo offices provide supports in a positive, customer centred manner and also that the capacity of staff to provide quality information to those seeking their supports is increased.

Negative measures

Over the past number of years changes have been made to supports for one parent families. The NRP states that the purpose of the reform is 'to strengthen the links between lone parents and the labour market, thereby reducing the risk of long-term welfare dependency'. In reality however the changes have led to a reduction in the labour market participation of people parenting alone over the past few years while poverty levels among one-parent families has increased.

What's missing

The NRP does not address access to quality jobs or in-work poverty. This is of major concern as one in five of those in work experiences material deprivation and 5% is at-risk of poverty. The

Government has set up a Low-Pay Commission, but this is limited to looking at the National Minimum Wage. Much work needs to be done on understanding and addressing the issue of precarious work and decent pay.

LATVIA

Positive measures

Support for measures to increase employability, but insufficient investment in production, manufacturing, trade and market development to ensure the creation of quality jobs.

Negative measures

No real job offers for people in poverty and marginalized groups.

LUXEMBOURG

Positive measures

The introduction of the Youth Guarantee. A Reform of the public employment service has been carried out. Individual coaching is explored.

Negative measures

Budgetary cuts like reducing mobility and reinsertion credits with unemployment benefit...

What's missing

A comprehensive strategy to fight unemployment, integrating the education system is seen as a necessity, but it has not been implemented.

MALTA

What's missing

A true political will to bring about social justice in the work place.

THE NETHERLANDS

Positive measures

- The extra input to fight early school leaving,
- The extra input to fight youth unemployment,
- Extra funds to tackle severe debts and child poverty.

Negative measures

- Although we are happy about the 100 million € per year, this is not enough,
- The major change in social security by the 1-1-2015,
- The austerity in health care, which costs thousands of (part-time) jobs,
- The rise in rents.

What's missing

A real attack on unemployment. A clear vision how to prevent that most of the population will earn no more than a minimum wage.

POLAND

Positive measures

- The Youth Guarantee programme has one priority for young people in more vulnerable groups,
- Childcare accessibility as a measure for increasing employment opportunities for women,
- Personalised services for people with disabilities.

What's missing

- Quality jobs,
- Tackling in-work poverty.

PORTUGAL

Positive measures

The priority given to youth is positive since youth unemployment is particularly significant at national level.

Negative measures

The need for an active inclusion strategy, as well as the access to adequate income is totally absent from the CSRs and NRP – which is quite worrying when we see a reinforcement of activation measures forcing (particularly young) citizens to accept any job and therefore to increase the precariousness of employment and, at the same time, we see a reduction of social protection benefits.

What's missing

There is a need to guarantee the assessment of the new measures, especially in what concerns those measures oriented to fight youth unemployment. This is quite important since we know that those training programmes in the work place are a cheap way to cover jobs for which people should be hired. And in many cases jobs are low-qualified and low-paid, that can't guarantee an adequate income to people and an adequate inclusion at social level. In other words, most of the youth employment initiatives (quite good to reduce statistical unemployment figures) risk promoting precarious jobs and reinforcing the number of in-work poor.

SPAIN

Positive measures

Most of the measures are just beginning. If they are the right ones, the outcomes will be seen in a couple of years.

Negative measures

The dimension of unemployment is huge, particularly in the case of young individuals. Many problems and delays in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee have been mentioned. For example, in the Madrid Community (and others) the individual should have an electronic DNI in order to register, and this is causing new disadvantages to those who cannot get it, because they are immigrants or for other reasons.

What's missing

More proficiency and clarity in the implementation. It's difficult to carry out plans when the competences are transferred to the Regions.

SWEDEN

Negative measures

There is almost no mentioning at all of the increasing insecurity in the labour market, part time jobs, etc.

What's missing

Measures to improve the labour market for those with unsecure connection to the labour market and working poor.

UNITED KINGDOM

Positive measures

Employment rates are rising, but there is significant geographic, gender, ethnic and age variations.

Negative measures

The approach is not delivering sufficient quality sustainable employment. Many new jobs are low-paid, part-time, self-employed, in poor conditions, or all of these.

What's missing

A British business and government aspiration for a big push on investment in quality, sustainable jobs to give British young people a worthwhile future.

Benchmarking Iceland

Positive measures

Lower unemployment rate. "Job square".

Negative measures

There is a lack of part-time jobs and flexible working hours for people with reduced ability to work.

Key Concerns

The target may appear on track, but does it increase wellbeing?

The Joint Employment Report indicated that unemployment in the EU is slowly decreasing, standing at 10.1% in September 2014 (Eurostat). However, long-term unemployment is on the rise, and the employment rate of young people and the low skilled continues to be low. Unemployment decreased in 21 Member States, while it increased in AT, FI, FR, IT, LT, LU. However, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, monitoring is based on a **numerical indicator**, underpinned by the Eurostat definition, which states: "Employed population consists of those persons who, during the reference week, did any work for pay or profit for at least one hour, or were not working but had jobs from which they were temporarily absent." Such a reductionist definition does not take into account any complementary criteria regarding the quality or sustainability of the job in question. In the absence of such qualitative indicators, registered progress remains on paper, without necessarily translating into increased wellbeing and better lives for people.

In our members' assessment, some countries report having achieved (DE) or being on the right track (IE, LU, PT, UK) to achieve their national employment target. However, in addition to the broad scope of the indicator, as explained above, some of our members (PT) also point out that **cosmetic approaches are applied to statistics**, where, for instance, people undergoing active labour market policies or training are not counted as unemployed, neither young people in internships, although many are unpaid, and stable employment does not follow. This does not help achieve the employment target in a meaningful, sustainable way, and also undermines the poverty-reduction target in the process.

Quality of work and employment not prioritized, in-work poverty ignored

The vast majority of our members highlight the **missing quality dimension** in the Employment chapter of their country's NRP (BE, DE, HU, IE, MT, NL, PL, PT, ES, SE, UK).

Explicit **downward pressure on wages**, or lack of progress towards decent income from paid work, is explicitly highlighted by some EAPN networks (BE, CY, MT, NL, ES). Some members (BE, IE), mention a tax reduction measure for low income workers, but highlight that it is rather part of a regressive taxation trend, benefitting high earners most. Spain indicates that the conservative approach on wages is part of an explicit strategy to boost the country's competitiveness and exports. Only the Czech Republic and Romania report an increase in minimum wage. An increase in the UK minimum wage was announced in the July budget.

In-work poverty is another concern raised by our members, who lament not seeing it prioritised or even mentioned in the NRPs, despite it being a national problem (CZ, DE, HU, IE, LU, MT, SE, UK). Our Maltese members point out with concern that in-work poverty is being perpetuated including through public contracts. EAPN Poland deplores the disappearing focus on in-work poverty, which was featured in the country's CSR in 2012 and 2013.

Precarious, insecure and atypical contracts are also mentioned with concern by some respondents (CY, MT, UK, Eurodiaconia), as well as the **erosion of employment rights** (CY, HU, MT, UK). This is often linked to attempts to **undermine collective agreements and bargaining, and the key role of trade unions** (CY). Overall, most EAPN networks strongly highlight the lack of concern regarding quality of work and employment, adequacy of wages, sustainability of contracts and the link between employment and poverty.

A more positive example comes from Scotland, where our members welcome the new approach of the Scottish Government to "fair work", including initiatives such as the Fair Work Convention, the Scottish Business Pledge, and support for the Scottish Living Wage Accreditation Initiative, which is delivered by the Poverty Alliance.

Still no investment in job creation

The 2015 NRPs seem to continue the trend of previous years, where much attention is paid to activating people into jobs that are not (yet) there. Some EAPN networks (BE, DK, HU) remark that **investing in new, quality and sustainable jobs is not mentioned at all** in their country's NRP. In Malta, the Government is investing in public construction projects (tourism and real estate mainly), but our members underline that these jobs are often of very poor quality, and precarious. The only more positive example comes from Spain, where significant increases in job creation have been noted, as well as an increase in their quality.

More support towards the labour market needed, not more sanctions

Some members express concern over a continuation of negative activation policies, based on **increased conditionality, tightened eligibility, and harsher sanctions** (BE, IE, NL, PT, UK). Described by high-level documents as “reducing disincentives to work”, these policies often translate into cutting benefits, or threatening to withdraw them if people do not accept any job that is offered, or are deemed to have failed to take sufficient steps to search for work. Compulsory “public work” schemes for benefit claimants are also mentioned in some countries (HU, NL).

Other countries report some **cautious positive steps in the direction of a more supportive approach**, providing pathways to social and professional inclusion (HR, CZ, DK, FR, DE, HU, IE, MT, ES). However, while welcoming the existing initiatives, concern is still expressed that those proposed are not comprehensive enough, and/or would not reach those most in need (DK, FR, HU, SE), or will not be backed by adequate financial resources for their implementation (FR). While Croatia points out that an evaluation of current active labour market policies is underway, Portugal laments that such a much-needed assessment is not currently undertaken. In the Czech Republic, positive measures are reported regarding the increased capacity and quality of public employment services.

Some key groups prioritized – but not all, and no holistic approaches

Our members report that a number of NRPs **prioritise one or several key groups, particularly young people** (CZ, EE, FI, HU, IE, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, ES, UK) **and the long-term unemployed** (FI, FR, DE, IE, PT, ES).

Regarding measures aimed at **young people**, several EAPN networks express concern that they will not be enough or are wrongly focused (CY, IE, UK, PT, ES). Some members highlight that the Youth Guarantee is only concerned with employment measures and does not offer comprehensive support for young people and their non-employment needs (IE). Others caution against the risk of the Youth Guarantee being merely a statistical exercise, while de facto promoting precariousness and in-work poverty among young people (PT). Finally, several practical obstacles to implementation are still not tackled on the ground (ES, UK). On the positive side, Croatia highlights a holistic, supportive approach towards young people, and some positive measures are also reported from the Czech Republic – but only for highly skilled youth.

Similar concerns are expressed regarding measures for the social and professional integration of the **long-term unemployed** – that they are insufficient, incomplete, or will not reach their intended beneficiaries and / or objectives (CY, FI, FR, DE, PT). EAPN Ireland, however, welcomed initiatives such as Jobs Plus, while Spain has launched a Special Activation Programme Aimed at Long-term Unemployed. The results of these initiatives remain to be seen in time.

Other key groups in need of increased support are much less prominent in the 2015 NRPs. A few mention **older workers** (EE, FI, FR, LU, PL) or **people with disabilities** or health issues (DK, EE, PL). These groups are however missing from other NRPs reviewed by our members. Only Croatia reports positive, inclusive measures for most vulnerable groups, while Hungary notes that no group is mentioned aside youth. Regarding **women**, the Polish NRP speaks about promoting gender equality and increasing the accessibility of childcare, and the Czech NRP about increasing the availability and quality of childcare and reconciliation measures, while the Czech Government also adopted a Strategy for Equality between Women and Men for 2014-2020. Our members lament **the absence of references to homelessness** (EE), and **tackling discrimination** (BE).

Active Inclusion – the forgotten framework

Despite an explicit commitment in the Social Investment Package that integrated, comprehensive **Active Inclusion strategies** (combining adequate income support, access to affordable, quality services, and inclusive labour markets) will be implemented and monitored through the Europe 2020 Strategy, this concept seems to be **completely missing from the 2015 NRPs**. Our members strongly highlight the need for such holistic strategies to be urgently put in place, if the employment and the poverty-reduction target are to be achieved, and if people are to be supported into better lives, free of poverty and social exclusion (EE, DE, HU, IE, NL, PT).

Benchmarking with non-EU countries

Iceland reports a positive practice called Job Square, which offers services to individuals of all ages who are either registered as unemployed or are receiving financial assistance. However, they lament the lack of part-time jobs and flexible working hours for people with reduced ability to work. Norway mentions negative activation, with reinforced conditionality and sanctions for benefit claimants.

Key Messages

1. Change the approach to the employment target!

Ensure that monitoring is underpinned by quality job indicators, which promote good jobs, instead of fostering more precariousness and in-work poverty. Build positive synergies between the employment and the poverty-reduction targets of Europe 2020.

2. Support quality job creation, accessible to all groups!

Real investment is needed in jobs that last, providing decent incomes and adequate protection, in order to boost demand and purchasing power, as well as to protect people from poverty and exclusion.

3. Place employment as a route out of poverty within comprehensive anti-poverty and inclusion strategies!

Employment alone is not the answer to poverty – quality work is one element, which should be placed within comprehensive strategies, which tackle the multi-faceted nature of poverty, based on integrated Active Inclusion Strategies.

5. Education and Training

Introduction

The Education and Training chapter of National Reform Programmes defines national policies aimed at achieving the dual so-called education target of the Europe 2020 Strategy: 1) Reducing the rates of early school leaving to below 10%, and 2) Having at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds complete third level education. These policies should be underpinned by Guideline 9 of the Integrated Guidelines of the Europe 2002 Strategy. However, the Guidance Note on the preparation of the NRP does not even mention the education targets on par with the other 4, and “education” is only mentioned as part of the reporting on the employment target. The Annual Growth Survey refers only marginally to education, and always in connection with skills and labour market needs, except for a more encouraging reference “affordable quality childcare and education, prevention of early school leaving, training and job assistance”.

From the input provided by EAPN members, trends at national level seem to indicate that inclusive access to education, particularly for key groups and people in poverty, remains challenging, and positive approaches are marred by insufficient funding, and by a narrow focus on education as a labour market instrument, rather than a tool for broader personal and human development. This section explores our members’ assessment regarding progress made towards the dual education target of Europe 2020, as well as the adequacy of the proposed measures and initiatives in this respect.

Positive, negative and missing measures in Education Policies of the NRP

CROATIA

Positive measures

The National Curriculum for early and pre-school education is a basic document introduced for the first time to the early and pre-school education in Croatia. The document regulates all significant curricular components that need to be reflected in the overall organisation and implementation of educational activities in all kindergartens in Croatia. The Rules on the content and duration of pre-school education prescribing mandatory preschool programmes for all children a year before entry into primary education have been adopted.

When talking about reduction of poverty the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports has allocated funds for co-financing textbooks and accompanying supplementary teaching materials for primary and secondary school students, who are members of households that are beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum benefit and of social welfare assistance.

Negative measures

Development of the system for the recognition of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning as a long-term objective shall be developed through further development of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (HKO), but there is still no progress in this concern.

The Croatian education system is in the process of overall restructuring. Restructuring which continues in 2015 will be focused on the establishment of quality of the education system, the National Curriculum Framework will be established, as well as subject curricula for primary education and secondary education (gymnasium programs, vocational and arts programmes). However, when it comes to vocational education, an analysis is required regarding new vocational curricula for apprenticeship as part of vocational training which relates to education

for trades. Experience has shown that there is lack of involvement of social partners such as Croatian Employers' Association, and ambition to improve the quality and alignment of educational results with labour market needs.

What's missing

In the preamble, the document refers to an agenda of pending reforms that the government of Croatia prioritizes. However, there is still the limited coordination between employment services and educational services and incompatibility of the different reforms schemes.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Positive measures

The government claims in the NRP that it considers the inclusiveness of education a top priority, which was confirmed in 2014 by the adoption of a Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2020. The Action Plan 17 for Inclusive Education 2016–2018 as an implementation document of the Strategy in the field of inclusion is being prepared and will be followed by a similar document for the period 2019–2020. The plan will include concrete measures to achieve one of the main objectives of educational policy, which is to reduce inequalities in education, especially activities to promote inclusive education and solutions to early school leavings among vulnerable groups.

Negative measures

Some of the mainstream parental and teacher lobbying against inclusive education.

What's missing?

Lack of sufficient financing and resources towards inclusive policies in practise. No real solutions for schools currently having over 80% of socially excluded pupils (with tendency to continue without a lot of changes to the so-called school catchment areas in socially excluded localities). Growth of socially excluded areas, although a positive sign is that they are being monitored already by government (brand new Gabal's Map of socially excluded areas, 2015). Reform of pedagogical faculties, reform of educational "culture".

ESTONIA

Positive measures

- The state is planning to improve the quality of the educational system and adapt it to demographic changes.
- Continue to develop career advisory, services, availability of such services.

Negative measures

However they are forgetting that while making educational reform, they should take into account different levels of municipalities and their capacities. Also all children have the equal right to education. By closing smaller schools, we put that right in danger.

What's missing

They should continue with raising salaries for teachers, also at kindergarten level.

FINLAND

Positive measures

Decreasing early school leaving, developing early childhood education, Youth Guarantee.

Negative measures

The measures regarding the Youth Guarantee have not been sufficient.

GERMANY

Positive measures

- Quality campaign for teacher training to improve the education of teachers.
- Restructuring of the transition area between school and working-life.
- Raising educational attainment of socially disadvantaged people.
- Expansion of the day-care infrastructure.
- Expansion of the all-day schools.

Negative measures

Although in 2013 the share of early leavers from education and training (9,9%) was a little below the goal of 10%, there are significant regional differences. The share of youngsters without any graduation is almost twice as high in Eastern Germany as in Western Germany. Furthermore the negative link remains between social origin and educational success.

What's missing

Children and youngsters need to be supported in a school which accompanies them in a flexible, inclusive way and in cooperation with parents. Children and youngsters in multiple problematic situations need various offers with a low entry threshold for participation to tackle problematic personal and social situations early on.

HUNGARY

Positive measures

- There is a strategy against early school leaving. One of its measures is the early warning and pedagogical support system establishing interventions which serve to prevent drop-outs.
- Attending kindergarten is going to be compulsory from the age of 3 instead of the age of 5.
- Arany János Talent Fostering Programme.
- Tanoda (special schools) programmes are to be continued-these are affecting the whole personality to catch up with instruments outside public education mainly for Roma students.
- Second Chance type of schools aiming to redirect young people having dropped out from schools of secondary education back into the world of education.
- Initiatives strengthening further education programmes in order to increase the number and rate of disadvantaged students with secondary qualification in higher education.
- Public Education Bridge Programmes give a chance to young people who didn't get into secondary education after finishing primary school.

Negative measures

The quality of education, the methods used in the educational system on every level do not fulfil the requirements of the 21st Century. In most cases, students are not treated as partners, there is a lack of project-based education, discrimination is still strong towards Roma students, and there are unsustainable programmes.

What's missing

An adequate pedagogical attitude concerning reforms to education; well trained and respected teachers, sustainable programmes.

IRELAND

Positive measures

The NRP highlights a number of the supports available to tackle early school leaving and educational disadvantage. This includes the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) which 849 schools at primary and second-level schools are participating in. DEIS schools get additional supports compared to other schools. This programme retained its level of support throughout the recession despite the threat of cuts. The NRP highlights that the average Leaving Certificate retention rate in DEIS schools increased from 68.2% for the 2001 cohort to 82.1% for the 2008 cohort.

What's missing

EAPN Ireland has called for sub-targets for specific groups of children which have lower educational attainment. This would support a focus on policies aimed at bringing about an equality of outcome for children in these groups. This has not been done. For example supports for Traveller children to participate in mainstream education were completely cut in 2011 and supports for children with special needs were reduced.

LUXEMBOURG

Positive measures

None.

Negative measures

Also after their reform, the subsidies for students are still more in favour of students from better off parents than for those living in more vulnerable conditions.

What's missing?

Over recent years, most of the school system has been undergoing reforms. This is not yet the case for secondary schools, and there is still room for improvement in the other parts of the system.

MALTA

Positive measures

Post-secondary education for all. The effort to lower the rate of illiteracy with the initiative of reading clubs targeting pre-kindergarten children; various national initiatives to tackle the ever present problem of NEETS.

Negative measures

Malta is shifting to a market-oriented educational system.

What's missing

A basic understanding that to eliminate poverty, especially structured poverty and social and economic exclusion, requires more resources for personal, communal and social development to be put in place.

THE NETHERLANDS

Positive measures

Early school leaving measures.

Negative measures

The change of the student loan system, the end of the study grant.

What's missing

Overall the lack of special training for those who are out of employment, for whatever reason, to help them to find a (new) way to stay in work or get out of social exclusion.

POLAND

What's missing

Any mention of educational inequalities. Access to quality education for families living in poverty.

PORTUGAL

Positive measures

The focus on early school leaving is positive since Portugal has reached a good performance in reducing this problem over the last year few years. Since 2001, early school leaving has reduced from 44.2% to 17.4% in 2014.

Negative measures

The absence of the link between poverty and social exclusion and education measures. It's important to better evaluate some of the actions developed in the scope of the Programme *Educational Territories of Priority Intervention* because this programme sometimes allows the implementation of some negative experiences like the establishment of classes only for Roma children, reinforcing the discrimination of these minorities and the definition of alternative curricula that create gaps among these children and the others and don't prepare these children for the future (especially for a future in the labour market).

What's missing

See previous answer.

SPAIN

Negative measures

The new Education Law is not fully enforced. The budget has been reduced, although the measures are meant to be implemented.

SWEDEN

Positive measures

If they are effective or not - has yet to be seen. There is a big discussion about school drop outs and bad results in schools and how to deal with these problems. The ambitions are high, both in the field of keeping students in school and how to match the needs of the labour market to the education system.

UNITED KINGDOM

Positive measures

There is a focus on improving education outcomes.

Negative measures

Constant change in content including curricula and assessment and testing plus changes in school governance.

What's missing

Stability. Space for a more rounded childhood development. Lack of support for transition from school or college to sustainable employment. (Decrease in funding for further education;

inadequate number and quality of apprenticeship opportunities, failure of at least a quarter of graduates to enter graduate employment, pressure to take unpaid work placements without training etc.).

Benchmarking Iceland

Positive measures

Job Square.

Negative measures

Closing the upper secondary schools for people aged 25 and older.

Key Concerns

Unequal level of ambition regarding the targets

The Joint Employment Report indicates that early school leaving is decreasing across the EU, now standing at 12% (Eurostat, 2013). However, there are great discrepancies between Member States, with school drop-out still at worrying levels (over 20%) in countries like Malta or Spain. Improvement is also noted on the target concerning completion of tertiary education, which now stands at 36.9% (Eurostat, 2013). From our members' assessment of the National Reform Programmes, it appears that **the early school-leaving target takes priority over the tertiary education target**, which is less mentioned and supported by less measures. Equally, as starting points for Member States regarding early school leaving are very different, so is the level of national ambition concerning efforts in this direction. Our Irish members indicate that their country is performing well on both targets, and will probably reach both. Germany also reports progress, but indicates serious regional disparities (particularly in what concerns Western vs. Eastern Germany). Portugal prioritises the reduction in early school-leaving, and has achieved an impressive decrease (from 50% in 1992 to 19.2% in 2013). Conversely, school drop-out is not a key area in Poland and the Czech Republic, as the national rate is already among the lowest in Europe – however, our members point out that the rate is higher for certain disadvantaged groups.

Good efforts to tackle early school leaving, but much more could be done

Most EAPN members report that **attention is paid to curbing early school leaving** and that a number of supportive measures have been implemented or are additionally proposed (HR, CZ, FI, HU, IE, LU, NL, ES, SE, UK). Such measures include mandatory pre-school programmes for children (CZ, HR, HU) and investing in quality early childhood education and care (FI, HU, LU, ES). Some countries (HU, ES) have a separate national strategy for combatting early school-leaving. In others (NL, SE), education is made an explicit priority. Ireland welcomes the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, as well as the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), as very positive initiatives. In the Czech Republic, a proposed amendment to the Education Act is seen a positive, but its effectiveness remains to be seen. However, some networks (FI) express **reservations that these positive steps will be sufficient** to achieve meaningful, sustainable results.

Inclusive education

While preventing school drop-out seems to rank high on the policy agenda, the policies aimed at tackling it often do not take into account the full picture, as they do not investigate in depth the complex causes that lead some children and youth to leave school before completion. While education is free for all, it isn't accessible to all, and a number of barriers still prevent many children from fully accessing and benefitting from learning opportunities.

A number of EAPN networks (DE, MT, PL, PT, PL, UK) point out the **strong link between the social and economic situation of the children (and their families) and poor educational attendance and attainment**. Poverty and social exclusion lead to several unmet needs at different levels, which can severely interfere with one's ability to benefit fully from an education. This is a dimension often not explored by Governments, nor are there efforts to promote holistic approaches, featuring wrap-around support for families.

Another serious concern, expressed by several members (CZ, FR, HU, IE, MT, UK) relates to the **inadequate or reduced funding for the educational sector** in many countries. These cuts have had a number of negative consequences, particularly on those groups already facing difficulties in accessing education. For instance, smaller schools were closed, thus reducing access (EE), and resources were diminished for important programmes targeting key groups (IE, HU, UK).

School segregation continues to be a problem, with several groups of children, such as the Roma (HU, PT) continuing to face discrimination in schools, while others (such as Travellers, IE) have seen a reduction in support. In the UK, concerns are raised over the "free schools", an attempt to provide them with more autonomy, which can mean reduced transparency, democratic oversight, and participation of students and parents.

On a more positive note, inclusive education is prioritised in the Czech Republic. Croatia reports some supportive measures for low-income families, to support children from such families to access education. Equally, in Scotland, financial support continues for the education sector, while disadvantaged students are supported through the Education Maintenance Allowance, and tuition fees for higher education were not introduced.

Patchy approach and low priority given to lifelong learning

As indicated in the opening paragraph, much less attention seems to be paid by Governments to the target on lifelong learning and improving tertiary education outcomes. A few EAPN members report **reforms of the educational system** overall (HR, EE), but strongly underline the administrative implications, for different regions with different capacities. While Finland reports increased **financial support for students**, our Dutch members deplore the end of such support, forcing students to take out loans to continue their education. In the UK, mainly due to funding cuts, there is **no comprehensive support to second-chance and lifelong education**, the emphasis being put instead on narrow vocational training – however, lifelong learning is one of the five investment priorities for the ESF in the draft Operational Programme for 2015.

A few countries (HU, IE) mention a range of programmes to address **access and progression for people from disadvantaged groups**, such as the Tanoda initiative, second-chance schools, and the Public Education Bridge Programme in Hungary, and the new National Plan for Equity in Access to higher education due to be published in Ireland in 2015.

Skills and training prioritized, but not always in the right way

While the trend seems to have slightly decreased from last year, still a significant number of EAPN members (BE, HR, IE, MT, ES, SE) report that their Governments still pursue a **narrow interpretation of education and training, in linking it primarily to the needs of the labour**

market and of the economy. What is missing is a broader perspective, which looks at education from a more holistic standpoint, designed to equip an individual with essential life and personal development skills, beyond those needed for employment. Only Ireland reports some positive measures in this respect, in the new Further Education and Training Strategy.

Regarding the **effectiveness of programmes to provide people with key professional competences**, in order to improve their labour market participation, some countries point to progress (FI, IE, PL), while others (HR) indicate a number of missing elements, such as better involvement of social partners in the design of training programmes, and an appropriate system for the recognition of non-formal and informal education.

Benchmarking with non-EU countries

Iceland reports a positive practice called Job Square, which offers services to individuals of all ages who are either registered as unemployed or are receiving financial assistance, including educational services and services specifically for NEETs. However, our members lament the fact that people over 25 years of age are now denied access to upper secondary schools.

Key Messages

1. Support access to education for all!

There are complex social and economic obstacles people face in accessing educational opportunities, including discrimination, and governments must do more to establish integrated measures for families and children at risk of poverty, exclusion and segregation.

2. Restore adequate funding for education!

Roll back cuts in public spending that have significantly impacted on the quality and availability of education and support services, particularly those programmes reaching disadvantaged groups, and mark education as an investment priority.

3. Don't leave lifelong learning behind!

Support people's right to access educational opportunities throughout the lifecycle, by providing them with the necessary support and second-chance opportunities to further their education, in a broader sense than only equipping them with labour market skills, but offering opportunities to improve quality of life.

6. Structural Funds

Introduction

The major concern for EAPN is to see how far the commitment to deliver 20% of the European Social Fund (ESF) on social inclusion and poverty has been carried out. However, it is obviously early days, with most countries just having completed their Operational Programmes and just starting the process of calls and implementation. The main concern will be not just *how much* money is spent but the *quality* of the measures that are proposed. The ex-ante conditionalities require that an anti-poverty strategy should be in place, and members were keen to see how the thematic priorities including Active Inclusion have been reflected. From the Guidance note for the NRPs, it is clear that the NRPs should report on how Structural Funds will be used to support the NRPs, the targets and the Country-Specific Recommendations, so it is worrying that so many Member States appear to give little focus to it in the NRP. This raises important questions on how effective the spending is likely to be, when a clear strategy for the use of the funds to reduce poverty is not evident. The partnership principle has been strengthened in the new regulations through a new Code of Conduct, however no mention is made of it and many members highlight the continuing barriers for effective engagement with NGOs both in the Monitoring Committees and in accessing funding.

Positive, negative and missing measures on Structural Funds

CROATIA

Positive measures

The Republic of Croatia prepared four mainstream programmes for the period 2014-2020 that form the basis for the use of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Fund for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (EFPR):

- Operational Programme 'Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014-2020'
- Operational Programme 'Effective Human Resources 2014-2020'
- Rural Development Programme
- Operational Programme for Fisheries

For the objective to reduce poverty and social exclusion, a total of 991 million Euros has been allocated from ERDF, ESF and EAFRD. The Government aims to reduce the number of poverty-stricken persons by 150. 000 by 2020.

Negative measures

There is a lack of targeted measures and programmes that have a real potential to change the situation of particularly vulnerable groups - people with disabilities, the homeless, single parents, the long-term unemployed and others. Good practices and projects suffer from the inability to implement due to lack of funds provided for various measures and initiatives.

What's missing

The main challenges need to be addressed through ESF funds are: youth unemployment and better integration of young persons into the labour market, improving skills for employability through better alignment of the education system and labour market needs, solving long-term

unemployment and unemployment of disadvantaged persons in the labour market (e.g. persons with lower education, elderly and women).

CZECH REPUBLIC

Positive measures

There is some honest interest in allocation of ESF, implementing the 20% of ESF on social inclusion and poverty, i.e. tackling discrimination for key target groups, investing in social infrastructure – early learning and quality childcare, affordable housing, health seems to be covered in our Operational Programmes, consultations have been provided and information is being spread. There is also some approach towards coordinated approach in socially excluded localities being prepared.

Negative measures

Some chaos and lack of clarity regarding the implementation of the coordinated approach in socially excluded localities using ESF. Also personal problems and chaos in the Government Agency for Social Inclusion.

What's missing

We will see in time, it's not clear yet. Some NGOs if participating in the so-called *coordinated* approach in socially excluded localities will not be able to have individual ESF projects. But the coordinated approach may have some time delays and other practical obstacles.

DENMARK

Positive measures

It is still too early to measure the effects of the ESF and the social structural funds. It is only in May 2015 that the first funds are awarded to projects.

ESTONIA

Positive measures

Infrastructure investments will decrease and more money will be put in the educational system (e.g. R&D system). Some of the funds will be used for Food-banks, through FEAD. However since the need for "Food-bank" services is increasing, there is a need to increase amounts. This will help to provide direct services (distributing food for those who are in need).

Negative measures

Nothing is said about social infrastructure, affordable housing.

FRANCE

Positive measures

The flat rate system to avoid financial justification for small projects is a good thing.

Negative measures

The French administrative machine for the ESF is Kafkaesque and it generates real difficulties for a good use of EU funds by NGOs/Associations against poverty. The ESF tool has totally lost its sense, i.e. instead of paying attention to the quality of the projects it is the financial and accounting vision that seems to be the more important. ESF is more and more considered as a risk: rules changes from year to year, with a retroactive financial impact for NGOs, 2 or 3 years of delay to be reimbursed for projects which means that an important cash flow problem, difficulty to access ESF for small organisations etc.

What's missing

More fluidity in the system, stability of financial rules, less and more efficient controls (7 levels of control exists)...

GERMANY***Positive measures***

The Structural Funds are being used to reduce unemployment. Only the very small German EHAP programme is focused on people with multiple disabilities that cannot get access to labour market.

Negative measures

Small social NGOs are not able to apply for Structural Funds because administrative barriers are too high.

What's missing

A strategy for the future with the outcome focussed on a good life for all people.

A strategy for refugees.

HUNGARY***Positive measures***

It strongly builds upon the updated version of the National Social Inclusion Strategy, which was updated on the basis of new statistical data and policy developments. The measures, in accordance with the Europe 2020 target, intend to achieve the strengthening of social cooperation by:

- increasing the rate of Roma employment
- developing support networks
- supporting task reconciliation of family and workplace
- helping the children in deprived settlements at an age as early as possible
- integrated child programmes.

Negative measures

The document does not reflect all the at-risk target groups who are facing serious problems concerning poverty and social inclusion. There is no reflection on adequate minimum income and there are less programmes than needed on access to quality of services or inclusive labour market policies.

What's missing

An adequate, demand-oriented complex policy.

LUXEMBOURG***Positive measures***

The Operational Programme exists and even if it could be better, it is not all bad.

Negative measures

Increasingly funds are given to government agencies, PPP's or actors of the commercial sector, and less and less possibilities are left for NGOs. The reservation of 20% for anti-poverty programmes is interpreted in a very broad way.

What's missing

A real connection between the NRP and SFs.

POLAND

Positive measures

EU money on achieving Europe 2020 goals in Poland.

Negative measures

Lack of coordination in implementing some of the ESF financed projects and its outputs.

What's missing

Clear analysis of how the EU money spending is compatible with national spending for achieving the main strategic goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy in Poland.

PORTUGAL

Positive measures

The allocation of 23% to fight poverty and social exclusion.

Negative measures

There is no idea in the NRP what measures will be supported by SFs and its effective impact on poverty and social exclusion.

What's missing

Please see previous answers in the other items. There are a set of gaps in the NRP, especially concerning specific target groups and social problems that is also missing in SF orientations.

SWEDEN

Negative measures

Most of the money goes into the public sector and the results of the programmes are not that good. One reason for this is that the programmes run by Structural Funds are almost never implemented and mainstreamed into national systems, but end when they run out of funding.

What's missing

NGOs have difficulties in accessing the Funds, as they lack the money and skills to live up to the very high standards that is required.

Key Concerns

Limited information in the NRP, too early to measure results

Several NRPs appear to give **little priority to Structural Funds** and even less to the priority on 20% of ESF to be spent on social inclusion and poverty, despite the requirements of the guidelines for the NRP (FI, PT, UK). Finland comments that it is a very short text, with no mention of implementing the 20% of ESF on social inclusion and poverty. In Portugal, no information is given of the measures nor the impact on poverty. UK comments that Structural Funds itself is not mentioned in the UK Government response to the NRP; ESF is mentioned twice, only by Wales, in the sub-sections from the devolved governments and administrations. However, where information is provided, members comment that it is really too early to measure the effects, as first funds are only awarded now (DK).

More than 20% being spent on poverty, but often on existing programmes

Most members are positive about the 20% ring-fencing of ESF which appears to be included in all Operational Programmes. In some Member States, this commitment has been exceeded beyond the 20%, for example in Portugal, 23% i.e. 2570 million is allocated to social inclusion and combating poverty. In Ireland, 35% of ESF has been allocated to social inclusion and combating poverty and discrimination. However several members highlight that **much of the money will be spent on existing programmes** (IE, PT, SE). As EAPN Portugal points out, the proposals are not innovative, and are already being implemented by public entities. EAPN Ireland points out there is limited potential for community organisations. None of the NRPs provide any kind of clear analysis of how EU spending is compatible with national spending for achieving the strategic goals and targets of Europe 2020 (PL).

Employment is the main focus, not fighting poverty

Many members highlight that the social inclusion and poverty pillars of the Operational Programmes are focused mainly on employment and tackling unemployment, rather than a broader integrated active and social inclusion approach to poverty reduction (BE, DE, MT, UK). In Belgium/Wallonia, 250.000 Euros will be used to support accompaniment for the unemployed, the fight against discrimination in the labour market, socio-professional integration of migrants, training for disabled people, although in the overall ESF framework there is an area on social inclusion, the fight against discrimination and early school leaving. In Germany, the focus is entirely on reducing unemployment, with a small fund for people with multiple disabilities who cannot get access to labour market. This however reflects the fact that for Germany, the only indicator used is long-term unemployment with no indicators nor measures to fight poverty. In the UK's Operational Programme even the specific objective on promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and discrimination is largely focused on employability and access to employment. Worryingly, the **investment priority of active inclusion is interpreted as only labour market insertion** in the context of welfare reform, rather than an integrated approach to supporting access to quality jobs, services and minimum income.

Positive social inclusion approaches but missing key groups, concerns and delivery

A few members highlighted **some elements of a broader approach to social inclusion** but with important gaps (HR, CZ, EE, FR, HU, PL, PT). In Hungary, the pillar reflects the **National Social Inclusion Strategy** – increasing the rate of Roma employment, supporting networks, reconciliation, integrated child programmes, but **does not reflect integrated Active Inclusion and is missing key groups**. In Czech Republic, an integrated approach has been proposed, targeting main groups and including access to housing, and an innovative coordinated approach involving NGOs in deprived areas. However, the implementation is not clear. In Croatia, key at-risk groups are missing, particularly people with disabilities, homeless, single parents, long-term unemployed, also people with lower levels of education, older people and women. In Germany, refugees are a key missing group. In some cases, positive social inclusion proposals were left out – e.g. in the case of Poland, a major multimillion project developing standards for social assistance was blocked by the Minister of Finance. Some **questions are also raised about how the Fund for the most deprived will be implemented** (FEAD). Most countries have opted for the basic model of support to food and material deprivation programmes. In some countries this is welcomed e.g. Estonia, where the use of FEAD will support the rapidly increasing demand for foodbanks and will help to provide direct services. However, few countries have opted for the broader social inclusion model. This raises worries that poverty reduction measures will be reduced to only last-resort services. A further concern is how the programmes will be delivered. In France, although positive proposals are mentioned, there is concern about implementation,

i.e. they are concerned about which measures/criteria are to be used by the intermediary bodies to make sure that social insertion as well as professional insertion is promoted.

Increased investment in R+D not social investment

Some members highlight the increased focus on investment from the European Structural and Investment Fund Programmes (ESIF), particularly targeting Research and Development. However, the **focus is on spending not on impact** i.e. Poland points out that Government simply commits to increasing spending to 1.7% of GDP (EE, PL). In Estonia, there will be a welcome decrease in spending on infrastructure projects and more on research and educational systems, but **no visible increase in social investment** in social infrastructure, particularly affordable housing.

Major barriers for NGOs to access funding and participate in Monitoring Committees

Most members underline that small social and anti-poverty NGOs face increasing difficulties in accessing Structural Funds, including ESF in the current round as well as participating in Monitoring Committees (BE, EE, DE, HU, IT, NL, PT, SE and UK). Partly this is due to increasing administrative barriers due to the complexity of the application process and forms for small NGOs (DE, SE) as well as the major obstacle of co-financing requirements. The lack of Technical Assistance or Global Grants targeted at NGOs is another problem. For others, it is the overarching approach which prioritizes existing large-scale government programmes (some of which have been cut or under threat due to austerity measures) which give a limited potential for NGOs. For example, in Ireland, the only possibilities for community organisations are in Activation programmes under the Youth Guarantee and for people with disabilities up against the financing of existing government programmes. These obstacles seriously **undermine the potential for small-scale NGOs and community projects to contribute bottom-up innovative projects** which are so essential to ensure EU funds deliver effectively on the 20% of ESF on poverty. Doubts are also raised about how far the Code of Conduct will effectively involve NGOs in the Monitoring Committees. Currently a small number of EAPN networks are known to be actively involved (e.g. EAPN DE and EAPN ES⁵), but a recognition in the NRPs and Semester of the crucial role of participation of NGOs is needed.

⁵ EAPN will deliver a more detailed monitoring assessment of engagement later in the year.

Key Messages

1. Agree transparent mechanisms for monitoring effective delivery on poverty

Spending 20% of ESF on poverty is not enough. It is the quality of the spending which counts. Ensure that Member States show how EU funds contribute to the poverty target, and monitor the effectiveness of their spending by results.

2. 20% must go beyond employment! – Fund innovative approaches to integrated active inclusion and social investment!

There is a risk that the 20% of ESF will be spent entirely on existing programmes for tackling unemployment, with few guarantees of progress into quality jobs. Pressure must be brought to bear to ensure that the programmes invest in broader, integrated active inclusion approaches as well as social investment, particularly in social infrastructure such as affordable quality housing and early learning/childcare.

3. Press for real delivery of the partnership principle and involvement of small NGOs

Despite the important step forward on the Code of Conduct, early information indicates low participation of NGOs in Monitoring Committees and major obstacles for NGOs to access funding. The partnership principle must be regularly monitored together with stakeholders to ensure that the requirements are met, including access to funds for smaller project and NGOs.

7. National Social Reports

Introduction

The National Ministries of Social Affairs prepare the National Social Report (NSR) for the EU Social Protection Committee. These reports replace the National Strategic Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, and the previous National Action Plans for Inclusion (2000-2005) developed under the Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC). However, in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, the NSR is only developed every 2 years (with an update questionnaire in the intervening year as in 2015, which is not made publically available). It continues to have an unclear status in relation to the NRP and the Semester. According to the guidelines, the NSR is supposed to complement not replace the NRP, bringing additional detail on social policy, related to the Social OMC (i.e. social protection including pensions, health and long-term care and social inclusion policies) helping to measure progress and to detect problems concerning the Europe 2020 targets.

Despite being a potentially crucial document providing necessary detail on social policies, the NSRs currently appear to be a **low priority**. This is partly due to the fact they are not obligatory – this year only 15 were published by the end of July (AT, BE, BG, HR, CZ, FI, DE, HU, IE, LV, NL, PL, PT, SE, UK) and not all in English. The timing also does not appear to allow them to feed adequately into the NRP (produced by the end of June when the NRPs are produced in April). The general low visibility of the reports and the unclear follow up or impact on the NRPs, as well as the lack of a common joint reporting frame with the Commission (i.e. there is not a joint Commission/SPC report) also all contribute to low impact.

Most of the EAPN members who responded to the questions on the NSR, highlighted its low profile, scope and impact (BE, HR, CZ, DK, EE, ES, HU, FI, FR, IE, IT, MT, PL, PT, SE, UK). However, a picture emerges of the **potential importance of the NSR** as a valuable social monitoring document, currently hamstrung by its low priority and weak process including the involvement of stakeholders.

Key Concerns

Low priority and weak delivery undermining impact

Members highlighted the reduced number of NSRs, particularly the number published by the agreed due date. Several members signalled that, to their knowledge, no NSR update had been completed at the time (IT, MT, ES, SE). Although the Swedish report was completed later, the Swedish network had not seen it at the time of the questionnaire. In Denmark, the NSR was postponed due to the General Election. The lack of obligation and weak timing was seen by most to be undermining the impact of the NSRs, and its effective feed in to the NRP.

Weak participation of stakeholders in the NSR

Stakeholders including NGOs are meant to be actively involved in the NSR development, according to the Guidance Note. However, among the countries that answered the questionnaire, only three (BE, CZ, DK) were formally consulted in a specific process on the NSR, although in very different ways. The input from EAPN CZ was taken up through an electronic consultation and they participated in a large stakeholders' meeting held by the Commission for Social Inclusion. EAPN DK was asked to send a contribution to the competent Minister. Although the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network was invited to a formal consultation on the NSR, it was not able to participate due to a lack of resources. The Dutch Anti-Poverty network pursued a

“creative” and “pro-active” approach i.e. they sent their contribution to the relevant Ministries instead of waiting for their call for involvement. In Ireland, the NSR states that stakeholder engagement was through submissions and engagement on the NRP and engagement in other fora such as the Social Inclusion Forum, i.e. there was not a specific process on the NSR. The Department claims to have received other inputs, but it is not clear how these actually impact on the content of the NSR. In the UK, no stakeholder process was developed. This weak participation is a missed opportunity to engage social NGOs in supporting more effective social policies and feeding in to the NRPs.

Do the NSRs bring an added value to the NRP?

As pointed out, the NSR is required to report progress on social protection and social inclusion, and bring additional information to complement the NRP. However, is this really the case? As highlighted by BE, PL, PT, the NSR is primarily a **monitoring report rather than a political one** and its scope is merely descriptive. Basically, it merely lists all the government’s initiatives established during the year (PL). Portugal highlighted the lack of commitment to carry out an assessment of these measures in order to understand if, for example, employment measures are contributing to tackle the precarious labour market.

The NSR clearly gives the opportunity to **focus more on social protection and social inclusion than a chapter of the NRP**. It is thus interesting to analyse if the NSRs’ priorities differ, deepen or overlap those of the NRPs. In the case of the UK, the NSRs mainly present the same information of the NRP but in a shorter way. In general, there is a lack of monitoring on Europe 2020 targets, including the poverty and education targets, so there is no possibility of assessing progress. However, the British NSR does focus more on other policy areas such as pension reform, health care policy and long-term care.

In some countries (HR, NL) the main emphasis of the NSR is on the **reform of social protection in terms of its financial sustainability**, which in turn implies cuts in social transfers. Whilst in Estonia, the scope of NSR is more to reduce the share of people living in relative poverty after social transfers. However, most of the strategies (such as reducing gender segmentation in the labour market and making health/long-term care more accessible) envisaged by NSRs are **not picked up by the NRPs**. In the case of Hungary, the scope of the NSR overlaps with the NRP regarding family policy and the reform of the health system, but departs from the NRP in focusing also on **housing and homelessness care as well as on the adequacy/sustainability of pensions** and long-term needs. In this case, although the social policy area is enriched, the NSR does not directly target people experiencing poverty. In the case of Finland, the main policy strategies (youth guarantee, pension reform and reform of social and health service) of the NSR are the same as the NRP but more emphasis is given to **improving the conditions of key vulnerable and at-risk groups**. Similarly in Ireland, the general approach remains the same as the NRP (employment as the main way out of poverty) with the **addition of anti-discrimination policies and the development of a national strategy for the integration of Travellers and Roma people**. It also addresses the issue of homelessness and housing policy.

Conclusion

Although the NSR is currently a limited reporting exercise, it does provide additional, more comprehensive social monitoring that deepen the focus on social protection and social inclusion, highlighting discrimination and key target groups. However, it is not clear how the key priorities and groups are followed up or mainstreamed into Europe 2020 and the Semester. Participation of stakeholders in the design, delivery and monitoring of the NSRs remains disappointingly weak undermining its potential as a key social instrument its influence to make a more social and democratic European Semester.

Key Messages

1. Focus the NSR on reporting progress on Social OMC and Social Agenda

The added value of the NSR is in providing the detail on a broader Social Agenda focused on social protection and social inclusion. It should be linked to commitments to deliver on access to rights, resources and services, underpinned by the Common Objectives of the Social OMC, as well as Europe 2020.

2. Change the timing, process and make the NSR obligatory

The NSR must be treated with same importance as NRP. This means the timing must be changed to feed in earlier to the NRP. There also needs to be a joint reporting frame and report with the Commission, to ensure the proposals are taken seriously in the Semester.

3. Make the NSR the champion on participation!

Current participation is very weak. The NSR should be setting the example and providing guidelines and inspiring examples of how to do effective participation with stakeholders including people experiencing poverty, and transfer knowledge to Europe 2020 and the European Semester.

8. Governance and Participation

Introduction

The voice of citizens and people experiencing poverty is crucial to the development of effective policies that can deliver on poverty. Theoretically, the Semester and Europe 2020 share this commitment. According to the Guidance Note the NRPs are supposed to report on stakeholder engagement. This is supported by Recital 16 of the 2010 Integrated Guidelines. However, this is about to change under the new proposed guidelines, currently being finalized. Whilst EAPN members have attempted to engage in the process, particularly the NRPs and CSRs, progress has been slow with low quality engagement. EAPN has consistently argued for an increase in meaningful engagement, at all stages of the governance process, i.e. in the design and monitoring as well as in the implementation. In the AGS 2015, priority was given to increasing national ownership. There is evidence that the Commission is more actively encouraging Member States to increase their engagement, to get 'ownership' of EU policies, particularly economic governance. In this section, we monitor the trends regarding scope and quality of the engagement of civil society organisations, noting some small progress resulting from the increased pressure from the Commission. But is it too little, too late?

Positive, negative, and missing measures on Participation in the NRP

BULGARIA

Negative measures and what's missing

We have no dialogue with government. We hoped for some improvements, because Bulgaria is in a catastrophic situation, including democratically. But in reality there are no real changes. When we participate it's only on the periphery. We've been involved in consultation and working groups, but they have no important impact on the reports, and the dynamics of poverty and inequality continue to grow.

CROATIA

Positive measures

On 3 June 2015 EAPN Croatia organized a conference with the aim to discuss the key areas of the NRP 2015 adopted by the Government in April 2015. There is evident progress in the process of monitoring CSRs and advocacy to reduce poverty and encourage stakeholders' involvement in the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester. The last year, since it was established, EAPN Croatia has received strong support from media and relevant social partners.

Negative measures

EAPN Croatia is still not seen as a relevant social partner by the Government or any other coordinating body in the process of the NRP.

What's missing

EAPN Croatia is still lacking the human and material capacity for stronger involvement and missing a notable impact on the process for the NRP.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Positive measures

More positive engagement in the NSR, not the NRP. There have been electronic consultations and one wide stakeholders' personal meeting held by the Commission for Social Inclusion (operated by MoISA).

Negative measures

The NRP has not developed a participatory approach yet. The process remains as it was.

What's missing

More open and wider discussion on the NRP.

DENMARK

Positive measures

EAPN DK is a member of the Government's Contact Committee for the EU 2020 Strategy with 3 – 4 meetings per year. The first in February – March is about a draft for the NRP, which we received 1 – 2 weeks before. We can react at the meeting and then have maybe 2 – 3 weeks to give written comments. The next meeting is in the middle of the year with a more open political agenda, headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The last meeting is in the end of the year and is expected to be about the Commission's economic recommendations for the next years NRP.

Negative measures

The NRP is about decisions already taken by the majority in the Parliament/ the Government and as such not to be changed. Our reactions do not have short-term impact but are more likely to have small effect, if any, in the long run.

What's missing

Alternative and more effective strategies for reducing poverty, coming from the Government.

FINLAND

Negative measures

We made contact with the government representatives, but got no response. They said they would organize a seminar but they cancelled it.

FRANCE

Positive measures

As in other years, the National Council for Combatting Exclusion (CNLE) was asked to produce an input to the NRP. EAPN France made a contribution, which was largely taken up by the Council. This year, there was a greater effort by the government, the Secretary General for European Affairs, to present the NRP earlier, giving more time for inputs. Even if the time is still short, it shows a will to improve which is important.

Negative measures

The obstacles remain the short time-scale and the complexity of the document which does not encourage a quality participation. But the take-up by the CNLE of EAPN concerns was strong, and the views of the CNLE are produced as an Annex to the NRP, which gives it a strong visibility.

GERMANY

Positive measures

The consultation meeting was well-prepared and attended by the ministry. They were willing to give all information they could provide.

Negative measures

The number of stakeholders was very small and attendees were very much disillusioned by the process. Nobody expected their input to be taken seriously into consideration.

What's missing

A serious discussion about the causes of poverty and an exchange of strategies to put forward.

HUNGARY

Negative measures

We were not involved at all in the NRP process. The Government is not open to stakeholder engagement of any kind.

What's missing

Treating civil actors as real partners!

IRELAND

Positive measures

There has been some level of positive engagement with Commission and Government officials on an ongoing basis.

Negative measures

It is difficult to identify whether much of the engagement, and particularly submissions to the NRP, has had any impact on the NRP, even after making comments on the draft.

LUXEMBOURG

Positive measures

None.

Negative measures

For the first time, there was no consultation with stakeholders this year and the NRP was also not presented to the parliament.

What's missing

A real involvement of stakeholders at all stages of the process.

MALTA

Positive measures

A very positive approach has been made with Government officials so that better communication and consultation with EAPN MT is being made regarding the NRP.

What's missing

The government should consult regularly with anti-poverty organisations.

NETHERLANDS

Positive measures

We took the lead and invited others to join. We had a meeting with the Minister of Social Affairs about the Presidency. We gave the Ministry our proposals on what we want before they wrote the NRP. We have a great contact in a woman who works with the Ministry who values EAPN, but we have no contact with the Economic Minister who is responsible.

Negative measures

It is not enough to mention that we were asked to put something forward, it should be used and clearly stated that it came from our organisation.

What's missing

More involvement of the NGOs fighting poverty.

POLAND

Positive measures

The Inter-ministerial body as a space for discussing NRP proposals and the draft with government officials.

Negative measures

The NRP is not intended as an overarching reform agenda but only as a report of what the government is doing or intended to do. But all that is decided before and elsewhere than the Inter-ministerial body for the NRP process.

PORTUGAL

Positive measures

There is an intention on the part of the European Semester Portuguese Office to maintain contact with EAPN Portugal and receive the organisation's views/recommendations in terms of social policy.

Negative measures

In the elaboration of the current NRP there was no participation of Non-Governmental Organisations and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

What's missing

As we said in the EAPN assessment and proposals for the 2015 CSRs, "it's necessary to provide other moments of consultation and REAL participation of key actors, like social economy entities that have a deep knowledge of the national level context. But also the National Parliament level! This process of participation must be clearly defined at European level – guidelines for participation and monitoring of the European Semester. And we must underline that participation costs!! Therefore enough resources should be available for raising awareness about the Semester and for the support of people experiencing poverty in a more direct participation of its design, implementation and evaluation."

SPAIN

Positive measures

The influence reached by the Platform of the Third Sector's (PTS) inputs is higher than in 2014. The PTS is recognized to have played "a very active role in the development of 2015 NRP". We also engage with the Semester Officer. As in 2014, the government incorporates almost textual inputs from the PTS into the NRP, along with those of trade unions, employers and the

Autonomous Communities. A Social Agenda is being launched and part of it was included in the NRP, part was not. The plan is very good, but there is no money for implementation.

SWEDEN

Positive/Negative

Little involvement this year but there is an opening for a bigger engagement as we have got a social democratic/green party coalition, which wants to look again at the poverty target.

UK

Negative measures

There was no process to engage in. The context for engagement at the UK level has not been encouraging.

Key Concerns

How relevant and visible is the NRP? Who's in control?

Several members raised concerns about how relevant the NRPs were. Some emphasized the limited scope, asking whether it is worth engaging in a process that is more **administrative than decision-making** (BE, DK, FI, IT, PL). Many see the NRP itself as largely a report on past and future actions and not a plan, simply reflecting the main policy decisions which have been taken by national governments and parliament at a different stage. All members underline the **low visibility** of the process, even on the government's own website, as well as in the national media, amongst the general public and all but the most dedicated stakeholders. Moreover, as the report is **written primarily by Finance Ministries** and coordinated by the Prime Minister's Offices, the Social Ministries are clearly subordinates in most cases, which undermines the role and importance of the sections on poverty and social policy, as well as marginalizing the social stakeholders. Poland also pointed out that the more important Stability and Convergence Programme (SCP) is explicitly under the Finance Ministry and no attempt is made to have stakeholder engagement. However, others highlighted that the **consultation can take on other objectives**, within a longer time frame, aiming to influence overall government thinking (DK) or to wring concessions in specific areas (PL). Others felt that some impact on the text and policy was possible (FR, IE, ES), although Ireland points out that reflection in the text of some EAPN concerns doesn't necessarily imply direct impact, particularly when the majority of proposals were not taken up.

Narrow selection of stakeholders and low involvement of NGOs and people in poverty

The majority of members highlighted **some kind of stakeholder process** in the NRP although generally with **low quality**: (BE, HR, CZ, DK, FR, DE, HU, IE, PL, PT, ES, SE). A minority stressed the **lack of any process** at all (EE, FI, IT, LU, UK – but some process in Scotland). In the case of Estonia, this was temporarily due to the elections this year, although discussions with stakeholders had taken place the previous autumn. In the UK, there is currently no process or attempt at dialogue, with the dismantling of civil dialogue with the sector under the present government. In Italy, there is no dialogue, despite pressure from NGOs. In Finland, the process is seen as irrelevant, with stakeholders focussing on national policy processes. They tried to contact the government but got no response. They said they would organize a seminar but then cancelled it. Even where there is some engagement, there is a wide variation, emphasizing the lack of common guidelines and monitoring. Where dialogue exists, **prominence is often given to a reduced set of rather**

institutional stakeholders. The Economic and Social Councils are often the formal body for engagement (HR, HU, MT, PT) where grass-roots NGOs are not directly involved. For example in Portugal, the discussions on the NRP are with the political parties, regional Governments, members of *Conselho de Concertação Territorial* – local authorities, and the Social and Economic Council. In Hungary, it's the Economic and Social Council with a restricted consultation with churches, chambers and trade unions. In Malta, EAPN Malta made several attempts to contact the Ministry, saying they were willing to participate in the NRP discussions. After numerous emails they were presented with a Powerpoint presentation of the report in bullet points, so not able to give a feedback. In the Czech Republic, grass-roots NGOs are not involved nor people in poverty. Only Belgium, and France make **specific attempts to involve directly people experiencing poverty** in the discussions on the NRP, although this stays often rather symbolic, and as we see below, the results are limited. Attempts by members to ask to be included or even to be sent the NRP are often met by incomprehension (MT) or resistance (HR, PT).

Widening gap on quality of engagement

When it comes to the **meaningfulness of the engagement, there are growing disparities between different countries.** The main criteria for EAPN is: how far stakeholders are part of an on-going regular dialogue at all stages of the process, or if they are restricted to limited moments and role, i.e. the chance to input to the NRP, to respond to the draft, to receive responses to the inputs, and finally to achieve some impact on the text and the policies.

In reality, there is no common approach: In some countries one-off and mainly one-way information meetings are the norm (SE). Some provide formal opportunities to input into the NRP (NL), others have formal opportunities to give responses to the draft (FR, DE). Other members, however, described more strongly developed structured dialogue processes with regular meetings over the year which incorporated opportunities to engage at different stages (BE, DK, FR, IE, PL, ES). As EAPN France highlighted, at least the government displays an intention to engage...

Some small signs of increased engagement, but slow progress on impact

Several members have highlighted some **small improvements** even in the more limited processes, for example in Sweden where the one-off meeting explored the potential for increasing and improving the engagement with more regular contact; or in the Netherlands where EAPN coordinated a coalition to prepare a joint input which was sent to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment; or in Germany where the meeting was better prepared, and more time given to give inputs. In Portugal, EAPN is not part of the formal process but has met with a positive response from the European Semester Officer, and request for continuing dialogue. However, none felt there was currently any clear policy impact from their engagement. 6 EAPN members are engaged in a **more structured regular dialogue process** in their NRPs and the Semester: (BE, DK, FR, IE, PL, ES) and highlight some improvements both in the process and their engagement, however small. 2 of the EAPN networks (DK and IE) have noticed the positive results on engagement and profile arising from their national pilot cross-sectoral alliances on the European Semester funded by a Joint Action project by the Commission under a 1 year call: Semester Alliance⁶. However, all the networks highlight concerns about the impact, questioning whether the extreme effort and expenditure of time, resources and hope... is worth it. The Czech Republic highlighted improvements in participation in the NSR but not in the NRP.

⁶ EU Alliance for a more democratic, social and sustainable Semester (Semester Alliance) – coordinated by EAPN with 16 social and green NGOs/trade unions). See here for more details. <http://semesteralliance.net/>

Some more encouraging practices?

BELGIUM

BAPN participates in the Belgian Platform Against Poverty (BPAP), with a specific role to prepare input to the Platform together with people experiencing poverty, as part of a regular dialogue on anti-poverty policy. However the BPAP does not have power over the NRP, where decisions are made by the prime minister. This year they were asked to make a presentation to the meeting organized by the BPAP on the NRP, but it's not clear if there was any impact.

DENMARK

EAPN is part of the government's contact group 2020, with regular dialogue meetings (3-4 a year), where they discuss the draft of the NRP, react to it and get feedback as well as broader political discussions. They've developed good relations with government and also the European Semester Officer from the Commission representation, particularly through the cross-sectoral pilot Semester alliance. However, they don't expect to have immediate impact because of the restrictive reporting nature of the NRP process, although they aim to shape longer-term thinking.

FRANCE

EAPN feeds into a meeting with the National Council for Combatting Exclusion, which involves social partners, regional and local authorities, Parliaments, NGOs, people experiencing poverty, who have a formal dialogue role with the government providing input to the NRP. This year, the Secretary General for European Affairs that organized the NRP gave more time for responses, which seemed to show more commitment to the engagement. EAPN said that their inputs were taken on board by the Council. The Council's proposals are separately annexed to the NRP document.

IRELAND

The Department of Taoiseach (PM) coordinates the input onto the NRP, with the content provided by relevant government departments. The consultation process involved an invitation from the Minister of State for European Affairs to make a submission to the NRP and an opportunity to comment on the draft. The Department of Social Protection held a consultation workshop with community and voluntary organisations, and trade unions on the relevant sections of the NRP. Some issues from this consultation are mentioned in the section in the NRP dealing with stakeholder engagement. The *EAPN Ireland Europe 2020 Working Group* engaged at all stages, making a submission, commenting on the draft NRP and attending the workshop. EAPN Ireland also coordinates the *Better Europe Alliance* (a pilot alliance funded by the European Commission last year) which has been engaging cross-sectorally in the Semester process, analysing the CSRs, making proposals to the 2015 CSRs and inputs to the Mid-Term Review, with a positive engagement with officials of the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). Some positive examples of impact are that the Government has begun to expand supports provided by the National Employment Service to long-term unemployed and to pilot engagement with people on Disability Allowance. However, it's not possible to identify comments from EAPN IE which are included in final draft - there is no mention of poverty, equality or gender impact assessment nor does it address quality work and pay, with a limited understanding of Active Inclusion. An additional positive measure is the publication of all submissions and comments on the draft NRP on the Government's website.

POLAND

EAPN PL underlines that the NRP is written by Ministries, with minimal visibility. EAPN PL is the main actor who tries to attract media attention to the poverty goal. In terms of formal

consultation, EAPN is part of a consultation mechanism with stakeholders through the inter-Ministerial body coordinated by the Ministry of the Economy. They have regular meetings and working groups. EAPN Poland has used the forum to raise the thorny issue of the 'achievement' of the low poverty target, (set without consultation) and the need to set a new, more ambitious one. They didn't succeed, but managed to have the debate and got written answers to the questions. As a result they did succeed in getting agreement to the development of a new Government Assessment on poverty.

SPAIN

EAPN Spain is an active player in the formal consultation dialogue between the 3rd Sector and the Government. Detailed discussions took place with the opportunity to provide inputs and respond to drafts, as well as broader discussions. EAPN Spain highlights that a whole section of the text from the sector was directly incorporated into the text p. 93-4, reflecting their input. The NRP has also taken on board directly some key proposals: promoting social inclusion and poverty as main objectives in the 3 sections, role of 3rd Sector Social Action with a new law, strengthening the effectiveness of active employment policies and prioritising those further from the labour market, quality of education and training, more equitable tax system with higher rate cut for middle and low incomes, implementation of National Action Plan on Social Inclusion and development of a National Strategy for the Homeless, comprehensive plan for family support, protection of mortgage holders in suspension of mortgage releases and max income thresholds, making public procurement social clauses an instrument of social integration public procurement etc. However, as Spain is under the Excessive Deficit Procedure the deficit reduction implies cuts of 18 million.

Key Messages

1. Participation is key to restoring EU credibility with civil society actors

The involvement of people experiencing poverty and exclusion and their NGOs in quality stakeholder engagement is an important pre-requisite to restoring democratic legitimacy, accountability and confidence in the EU. However, it must lead to real impact on policy development to combat poverty.

2. Agree Common Quality Guidelines/ Indicators on participation to combat divergence

The widening gap in the extent and quality of NGO engagement across Member States in the Semester requires urgent action. Common guidelines should establish benchmarks for regular constructive dialogue with stakeholders at all stages of the process which are monitored/reviewed annually through the Semester. Exchange of inspiring practices should also be encouraged.

3. Give the European Semester Officer a clear role to engage NGOs

The role of the Semester Officer is crucial, with funds and access to decision-makers at the national and EU level. Transform their role into 'participation officers', with a specific brief to engage NGOs and support them to involve people with direct experience of poverty.

INFORMATION AND CONTACT

For more information on this publication, contact

Sian Jones – EAPN Policy Coordinator

sian.jones@eapn.eu – 0032 (2) 226 58 59

See EAPN publications and activities on www.eapn.eu

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



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK. Reproduction permitted, provided that appropriate reference is made to the source. September 2015.



This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>

Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission may be held responsible for use of any information contained in this publication. For any use or reproduction of photos which are not under European Union copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holder(s).