

TOOLKIT ON ENGAGING WITH EUROPE 2020 AND THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER

COUNTRY REPORTS,
COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS,
NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMMES 2016

Introduction

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

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

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

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

This Toolkit is designed to help EAPN members engage during 2016 with the European Semester delivering on Europe 2020, and in particular with Country Reports, Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs), and the preparation of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs). It supports the delivery of EAPN's Europe 2020 advocacy strategy, and it aims at providing you with brief, to-the-point information about the processes and the opportunities for engagement, by clarifying the key elements, timeline, and strategic actors of the new process, as well as giving links and suggesting different ways of involvement. We also give some tips for engaging in the new round, building on members' experiences from the past years, and previous such Toolkits drafted with members. If any of the terms used in this Toolkit are not clear, please refer to the [Glossary](#) on the EAPN website. For any other query, please contact the [Secretariat](#).

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What is Europe 2020? What is the European Semester?

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

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

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

- 5 million more people are now in poverty (122.3 million), a shortfall of 26 million (in 2014).
- The employment rate has declined to 69.2% (2014), leaving a shortfall of nearly 6%.
- Early school leaving has reduced to 11.2% (2014), leaving a shortfall of 1.2%.
- Tertiary educational attainment stands at 37.9 (2014), leaving a shortfall of over 2%.

Monitoring progress and ensuring the active involvement of Member States are key elements of the Strategy. This is done through the [European Semester](#), an annual cycle of macro-economic, budgetary and structural policy coordination.

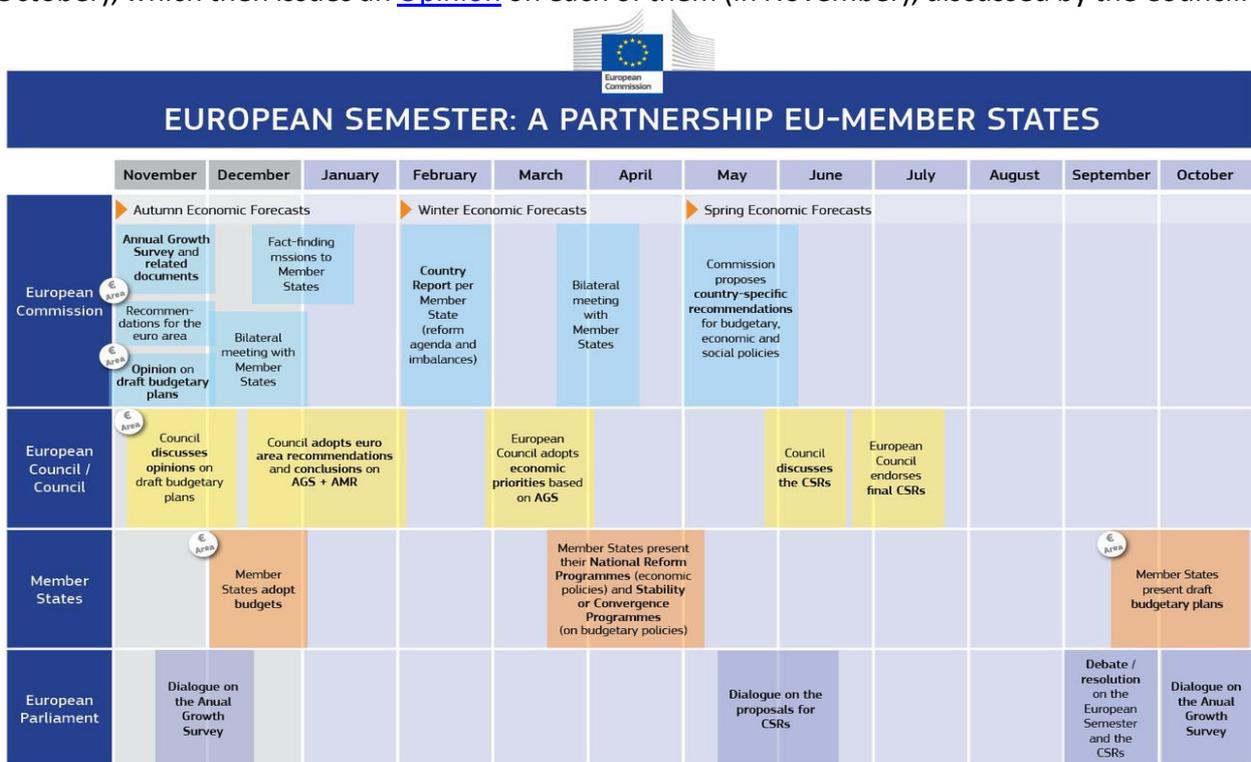
WHEN?	EUROPE 2020 (thematic surveillance)	STABILITY AND GROWTH PACT & MACROECONOMIC IMBALANCES PROCEDURE (macroeconomic & fiscal surveillance)
November	Annual Growth Survey (EC)	
	Alert Mechanism Report (EC)	
February	Country Reports (EC)	
April	National Reform Programmes (MS)	Stability / Convergence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

EC = European Commission; MS = Member States

¹ Eurostat (see full tables [here](#)).

The key stages in the European Semester are as follows:

- **In November**, the Commission issues its [Annual Growth Survey](#), which sets out EU priorities for the coming year. It is discussed in the European Parliament and the Council.
- **In December – January**, the Commission holds fact-finding missions and bilateral meetings with the Member States, on the process and priorities, and what they mean for each country.
- **In February**, the European Commission issues the [Country Reports](#), assessing progress on the EU priorities and the CSR implementation and highlighting key areas of intervention for each Member State. In 2016, they are released on February 24th.
- **In March**, EU Heads of State and Government (i.e. the European Spring Council) takes stock of the overall macroeconomic situation and of progress towards the Europe 2020 targets, and provides policy orientations covering fiscal, macroeconomic and structural reforms.
- **In mid-April**, Member States submit their Stability / Convergence Programmes (SCP) for ‘sound public finances’, as well as [National Reform Programmes](#) (NRP), which detail how targets will be reached, what national policies will be implemented, and how the EU guidance has been taken into account from the Country Reports and CSRs (see below. Another round of bilateral meetings with Member States takes place at the national level.
- **In May**, the Commission proposes [Country-Specific Recommendations](#) for every Member State, except for those subject to macro-economic adjustment programme, based on the Country Reports and the National Reform Programmes. The CSRs provide tailor-made policy advice to Member States in areas deemed as priorities for the next 12-18 months.
- **In June**, national Governments discuss the proposed Recommendations also in Council formations (EPSCO and others), as well as in advisory bodies (Social Protection Committee, Employment Committee), and in the European Parliament.
- **In July**, the Council formally endorses the Country-Specific Recommendations. Policy guidance is thus given to Member States before they start to finalise their draft budgets.
- **In the Autumn**, the Eurozone Governments present the draft budgets to the Commission (in October), which then issues an [Opinion](#) on each of them (in November), discussed by the Council.



Glossary: AGS: Annual Growth Survey – AMR: Alert Mechanism Report – CSR: Country-Specific Recommendations – EDP: Excessive Deficit Procedure

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Key Instruments – Country Reports, NRPs, CSRs

Country Reports

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

From 2015, the system has changed, and a new approach proposed by the new European Commission, which now issues [Country Reports](#) in February, containing the detailed national analysis previously included in the Staff Working Document which used to accompany the CSR. These Country Reports assess the progress of each Member State in addressing the issues identified in the previous CSRs, including an in-depth review under the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure. For Member States with a macro-economic adjustment programme, the Report discusses progress with the implementation of reforms. Individual Country Reports were presented this year on February 24th. They were accompanied by a proposal for a [Council Recommendation](#) on the economic policy of the euro area, and a [Staff Working Document](#). The new model, with releasing these Reports in February, aims at them providing the basis for dialogue with Member States in bilateral meetings and feeding into the preparation of National Reform Programmes (as well as Stability / Convergence Programmes), to be submitted by Member States in mid-April. They also provide a potentially key moment for stakeholder engagement.

National Reform Programmes (NRPs)

[National Reform Programmes](#) are the yearly reports prepared by the Member States, demonstrating how they are implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy (past and future actions), the priorities of the Annual Growth Survey, and the Country Specific Recommendations. They should describe their implementation of 5 overarching EU targets to be reached by 2020 (see above), translated into national targets by each Member State. Key for EAPN are the poverty target – to achieve a reduction in poverty and social exclusion of at least 20 million people, implemented through 3 indicators (at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation, and low work intensity), the target to reach 75% employment rate, and the one aimed at reducing school drop out to below 10% and improving completion rate for tertiary education. Measures described in the NRPs should be correlated to the national targets, and should be concrete, reflect urgency and detail budgetary consequences. Each year's NRP should build on the previous, and give emphasis to implementation of the CSRs.

Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)

The [Country Specific Recommendations](#) are policy recommendations made by the Commission for each country within the European Semester, based on a review of each Member State's economic and social performance in the previous year, and on how far they are delivering on the EU-wide priorities set out in the Annual Growth Survey. The recommendations are concrete, targeted and measurable, and concentrate on what can realistically be achieved in the next 12-18 months. As countries face different challenges, the recommendations tailor the Annual Growth Survey priorities to the situation in each Member State. The CSRs are drafted by the European Commission, after a thorough assessment of progress since the previous year's CSRs, and a detailed analysis of the National Reform Programmes and Stability / Convergence Programmes, submitted by Member States in April. The CSRs are debated in the Council formations (eg EPC, EMCO and SPC), before being discussed and endorsed by Heads of State or Government at the European Council in June. The final adoption of the CSRs in July concludes the European Semester. The work is then handed over the Member States for the national semester for implementation.

Other elements

Mid-Term Review

The Mid-Term Review of the Europe 2020 Strategy looks at the current state of play of progress on the targets, as well as at the functioning of the Strategy and its coordination process, the European Semester. The European Commission put forward, in early 2014, a [stock-taking communication](#), assessing the status quo and laying the grounds for a public consultation (May – October 2014). On 3rd March 2015, the European Commission adopted a [Communication](#) summarising the results of the public consultation. The document indicates that 755 responses from 29 countries were received, with social partners, interest groups and non-governmental organisations being the most represented category of respondents (41%).

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

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

You can also consult EAPN's [position paper](#) and [response](#) to the public consultation. Next steps of the process include that the European Commission will present proposals for the review of the Europe 2020 Strategy early in 2016.

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Indicative Timeline and Checklist for EAPN members

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Europe 2020 / National Reform Programmes</i>	<i>EAPN Action National level</i>
November 2015 – February 2016	26 November - The European Commission issued its Annual Growth Survey (AGS), which sets out EU priorities for next year. The Commission also holds bilateral meeting and fact-finding missions in countries.	Contact key interlocutors (SPC member, Independent Expert, European Semester Officer, your Governments, country desk officers in DG Employment) to find out more about the process, the timing, and which are the best opportunities for input. Try to get involved with the bilateral meeting / fact-finding mission in your country.
February 2016	26 February – The Commission issues Country Reports.	Working together on Country Reports 2016 and CSRs 2015: read your Country Report and prepare a draft response to the template fiche / questionnaire sent by the Secretariat: positive and negative impact, new policy developments, analysis, how far have CSRs been implemented, alternative recommendations.
March 2016	17-18 March - European Spring Council issues guidance for national policies, on the basis of the AGS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4th & 5th March in Brussels: Attend EU ISG meeting • Review the Country Report and use it to articulate your proposals for the upcoming NRP) + return the fiche / questionnaire to the Secretariat (15th of March). • Continue to press for a stakeholder engagement process, including commenting on any drafts, and sending your inputs to your Government, European Commission desk officers, and the European Semester Officers, as well as other contacts / social media etc.

April 2016	15th April - Member States submit their National Reform Programmes. Second round of bilateral meetings carried out by the European Commission in Member States.	Get hold of your NRP and review them together with your Network or Organisation, checking them against your inputs; issue a Press Release, send your reaction to your Government, the European Commission desk officer, the European Semester Officer. Try to get involved in the bilateral meetings.
May 2016	The Commission assesses the NRPs and adopts Country Specific Recommendations	Send your input to the Secretariat on the draft NRP assessment questionnaire. Send your feedback to the Secretariat on the quick reaction to the CSRs.
June 2016	The Council formations and the European Parliament discuss the CSRs. The European Council endorses them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 16, in Brussels: Attend EAPN's policy conference and EU ISG meeting (joint work on the NRPs). • Send the completed NRP questionnaire to the Secretariat after the meeting.
July 2016	The Council formally endorses the CSRs.	Send your comments on the draft joint NRP assessment report prepared by the Secretariat.
September 2016	National Semester: Member States present their draft budget to their Parliaments and implement their NRPs and the CSRs. The European Parliament adopts resolution on the CSRs.	Disseminate the EAPN synthesis report and your own inputs / reactions to your Government, the SPC representative, the Independent Expert, the European Semester Officer, the country desk officer in DG Employment, the media, and other stakeholders.
October 2016	15th October - Member States in the Euro area present their national draft budgets to the European Commission.	27-29 October , in Bruges – Attend EU ISG meeting and GA, joint work on the European Semester and next steps. Agree input to the upcoming 2017 Country Report.
November - December 2016		Provide input on the draft response to the AGS prepared by the Secretariat. Prepare your assessment of the Country Specific Recommendations.

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Recent EU Policy Hooks

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

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

As indicated in the first section of this Toolkit, the AGS is the document that launches the European Semester, by setting out the broad EU economic priorities for the year to come. It is the first step in the annual cycle. The Annual Growth Survey 2016 was adopted on November 26th 2015, and it was, as usual, accompanied by the Joint Employment Report (JER), among other Annexes. The EAPN Secretariat posted a [Press Release](#) following the launch, sent a [letter to European Commission President](#) Jean-Claude Juncker, and a [letter to the EPSCO Council](#), and prepared a [short response](#), which highlights positive areas that may be useful to quote, as well as missed opportunities and key Recommendations (AGS & JER).

The AGS is organised around 3 main priorities, the same as in the previous year:

- 1) Re-launching investment
- 2) Pursuing structural reforms to modernise our economies
- 3) Responsible fiscal policies

Within these priorities, Europe 2020, the social dimension, and in particular the poverty target, seem completely invisible. Some positive references include:

1. Re-launched investment priority

- There is a new focus on **investing in human capital**: i.e. equipping people with the right skills to reduce unemployment and reduce risk of poverty.
- An explicit call is made for **social investment in healthcare, childcare, housing support and rehabilitation services**, although its purpose is only to ‘strengthen their capacities to engage in the labour market and adapt’.
- It also mentions that “**Social investment** offers economic and social returns over time, notably in terms of employment prospects, labour incomes and productivity, prevention of poverty and strengthening of social cohesion.”
- An important reference is made to **Active Inclusion**, in this section highlighting that social infrastructure must be provided in a more flexible, personalized, more integrated way to “promote the active inclusion of people with weakest link to the Labour Market.”

2. Structural Reforms

- Although the **need for common standards** is raised, it is primarily focused on labour markets, competitiveness, business environment and public administrations, as well as tax, not on social standards that can ensure progress towards delivery on social and employment rights.
- There is **some focus on job creation** – but no detail is given on how it will be carried out.
- **Tackling long-term unemployment** is recognized as a key factor to tackle poverty and social exclusion, referencing the long-term unemployment proposal for a Recommendation.
- Reducing the **gender pay gap** – promoting work/life balance, care facilities and leave and working hours, as well as tax/benefit disincentives for second earners is a priority, with particular attention to single parents and people with caring responsibilities.

- Effective **employment protection** and promotion of labour market transitions is highlighted, and the importance of stable and predictable work conditions which can “induce employers and employees to invest more in skills and lifelong learning. Temporary contracts should enable transitions to more permanent contracts, not precarious jobs.”
- More **effective social protection systems** are recognized as necessary to confront poverty – but the statement is undermined by the priority given to efficiency and incentives to work, and the emphasis on its role in confronting poverty and social exclusion, rather than on prevention and support for universal systems that guarantee social cohesion and social solidarity for all.
- However, an important reference to “**adequate and well-designed income support**”, such as unemployment benefits and minimum income schemes are defended because it “allows those out of work to invest in job search and training, increasing their chances of finding adequate employment that matches their skills.”
- Comprehensive **integration measures** are supported particularly for **refugees** – with the need to facilitate access to labour market, and ‘participation in society’.

3. Responsible Fiscal Policies

- The AGS requires more effective action to tackle **tax fraud and tax evasion**, seeing it as essential to support public investment and to reduce taxes.
- Whilst priority is given to ensuring **sustainable health, long-term care and pension systems**, the need to provide **adequate protection for all** is also highlighted.
- Although cost effectiveness for health care is the main focus, adequate access is mentioned with the recognition that **investment in health** improves labour market participation and productivity, but also encourages investment in prevention and early detection.

Joint Employment Report (JER)

The Joint Employment Report forms an Annex of the AGS and reviews national policies meant to reach the employment, education, and poverty-reduction targets of Europe 2020, as presented in the National Reform Programmes. Unlike the 2015 JER, this year’s document does not explicitly monitor progress on the Europe 2020 targets, although the poverty target is specifically analysed, and references are made to the topics of employment and early school leaving. The Joint Employment Report continues to constitute, mainly, a stock taking exercise, listing country statistics and policy measures without complementing them with an in-depth qualitative analysis. While divergence within the European Union is often noted, no attempt is made to link policy efforts in a particular country to its statistical performance. Results are judged from a purely numerical perspective, and no policy guidance is offered.

The Joint Employment Report is structured around three main chapters:

1. Labour market and social trends in the EU
2. Employment and Social Reforms – Member State Action
3. Annex: Scoreboard of key employment and social indicators.

Positive references in the document include:

- **Attention is paid to the concept of quality jobs**, which is mentioned a few times throughout the document. There is acknowledgement that the increase in employment rates is mainly due to fixed-term contracts, as the number of permanent contracts has remained more or less the same since 2011. It is also noted that involuntary part-time work increased from 16.7% to 19.6%, and that job precariousness hits women, young workers, and the lower paid the most.

A very important element is the recognition that transitions from fixed to permanent contracts have been highest where the former were less used – where fixed contracts have been generalised, they acted much less as a stepping stone.

- The text **acknowledges the issue of low wages**, underlining that a third of recruitment difficulties arise from unattractive pay, combined with atypical working hours and lack of lifelong learning opportunities on the job. It also recognises that in-work poverty is rising, and that “only half of the poor who find a job actually escape poverty” (p. 28). There are also explicit references to the importance of living wages. Finally, the documents mentions that reductions in personal income taxes have supported labour market participation in a number of countries. The crucial role of wages is also highlighted by the recognition that the slight increase in real gross disposable household income in 2014, by 2.2%, was largely due to increases in wages.

- The **level of poverty and social exclusion across the EU has been recorded as stable or slightly decreasing**, which is viewed rather as an achievement, with no mention of the fact that, still, nearly one European citizen in four experience poverty: 24.4% in 2014 (122 million people), compared to 24.5% in 2013 and 24.7% in 2013 and still one point higher than in 2009, when the Europe 2020 target was launched (23.3%). The decrease is attributed mainly to reductions in severe material deprivation and the number of jobless households. Very importantly, the Report mentions that the at-risk-of-poverty indicator remained stable at 16.6%, but the poverty threshold is decreasing, reflecting a continuous deterioration of living standards.

- There is also a **recognition of increasing divergence between Member States** and the need to establish common benchmarks which could support ‘upward convergence’. For example, while 9 MS achieve at risk of poverty or social exclusion rates (AROPE) of below 20% (CZ, NL, FI, SE, FR, AT, DK, LU and SK), 6 MS have rates above 30% (BG, RO, EL, LV, HR, LT).

- **Inequality is highlighted** as remaining stable in 2013, with a slight increase in the Euro area, but it is the growing gap between countries’ inequality rates that is emphasized, with the highest figures in PT, LT, LV, EL, BG and RO. This is partly blamed ‘on the crisis’, but also highlights the impact of ‘different tax/benefit schemes and their redistributive roles and social protection systems’.

- Specific **attention is also given to income support/minimum income**, highlighting positive increases in BE, EE, HR, SE and RO, with a minimum insertion income introduced in Romania, and a pilot minimum income scheme in Greece. However, there is a worrying focus on increased targeting, and activation linked to benefits, with pressure to increase incentives to work through conditionality.

- The **working age population and children/poor families are highlighted** as at the most risk of poverty and social exclusion, with increases from 23% in 2008 to 25.3% in 2013, underlining that this is due mainly to job losses, but also rising in-work poverty. It also recognizes that, in most countries, cash transfers are crucial to reduce child poverty (p 29). Although a welcome reference is made to “Investing in children’ (p 41), including attention to early childhood education and learning (ECEC), the 3 pillars are not systematically assessed. New attention is also brought to people with disabilities, facing 30% AROPE.

- There are **encouraging references to job creation**, an issue that seemed forgotten in the European and national years over the past years. However, the expectation is that all needed jobs will come be generated by the market, and there is no mention of public investment in the creation of quality, sustainable jobs, accessible to those who most need them.

- There is a **welcome focus on some key groups**, such as women (with explicit references to the gender pay and pension gap, as well as to the availability and affordability of childcare), youth, migrants and refugees, and the long-term unemployed – but it is generally from a labour market perspective, rather than a broader social inclusion and social participation approach.

Age discrimination on the labour market is not mentioned, neither is long-term care for elderly people, nor Roma inclusion.

- Regarding education, there are **encouraging, positive references to investment in inclusive education, as well as in early childhood education and care (ECEC)**, coupled with stronger support for families. However, most of this support is in the form of work incentives and increased support for childcare. Decreased funding for education and training is noted as a worrying feature, but the role of cash transfers in alleviating child poverty is highlighted (as above).
- The document contains **encouraging references to access to housing**, quoting measures in a number of countries to build more housing, including social housing and to improve accessibility, particularly for the most vulnerable. It also mentions better support and protection against over indebtedness and evictions, and fighting energy poverty. However, the quality and affordability of new housing is not mentioned, nor is homelessness comprehensively addressed.
- The JER **recognises the growing unmet health needs**, and the significant gap between rich and poor, highlighting that low-income households face severe difficulties in accessing adequate healthcare. Measures to improve accessibility are mentioned, but nothing is said about affordability and quality, while, for instance, it is mentioned that 30% of people with disabilities experience poverty and social exclusion.
- There are some **references to austerity cuts**, such as decreased spending on public employment services and active labour market policies, on benefits, and on education and training. When income support was increased (in some countries), it was linked with activation measures, favouring negative conditionality.

[Proposal for a Council Recommendation, accompanying the Country Reports](#)

As explained above, the new Country Reports were accompanied by a proposal for a Council Recommendation on the Economic Policy of the Europe Area. The text focusses almost exclusively on the macroeconomic and fiscal performance of Member States, while poverty and social exclusion are not mentioned, there is one reference to ‘**preserving fairness**’. The document references **unemployment**, particularly that of youth and long-term unemployment. Member States are urged to encourage flexible and **reliable labour contracts** that promote labour market transitions and avoid a two-tier labour market, comprehensive lifelong learning strategies, effective policies to help the unemployed re-enter the labour market, and modern social protection systems that support those in need and provide incentives for labour market integration, as well as **reducing the tax wedge on labour, particularly on low-earners**. The [Staff Working Document](#) accompanying the proposal for a Council Recommendation, echoes the same recommendations, with some additional useful references to “modern social security systems providing **adequate income support** during employment transitions”, **adequate levels of pensions** that ensure decent living, and the mention that the rise in social benefits has, alongside income from work, raised disposable household incomes.

[Proposal for a Recommendation on the Integration of the Long-Term Unemployed](#)

In early 2015, [EAPN responded](#) to a European Commission public consultation on how best to support the reintegration on the labour market of the long-term unemployed (ie, those who have been unemployed for longer than 12 months). Based on the results of this consultation, the Commission then put forward a [proposal for a Recommendation](#) on the topic, to which EAPN prepared a [quick reaction](#), as well as a short, but more comprehensive, [response](#), highlighting positive elements, as well as missed opportunities. EAPN welcomed, particularly, the proposed courses of action involving **stepped-up outreach and registration of the unemployed** (to ensure

better coverage), **personalised, pathway approaches and tailor-made inclusion plans**, the introduction of **one point of contact**, and **close involvement of employers**.

[Communication launching a Consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights](#)

On 8 March 2016, the European Commission launched a public consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights, an initiative announced by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in September 2015, part of a greater effort to strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), and, implicitly, its social dimension, by ensuring upward social convergence between Member States. The public consultation will run till the end of 2016, and a White Paper, building on the results of the consultation, is expected in early 2017. While targeted at the Eurozone, all Member States are welcome to join the initiative.

The [Communication](#) launching the consultation is rooted in a rights-based perspective, and aims at being an important step towards rebalancing the European Union agenda and giving social considerations, including the fight against poverty and social exclusion, their due place in the European architecture. The document acknowledges that a significant share of the population is at **risk of poverty**, as well as **increased inequalities** (page 3). It highlights the link between economic, social and environmental development, but expresses it as 'inequalities hold back economic development' and 'income inequality may have a long-term negative impact on potential growth' (page 4). It is acknowledged that **labour markets should be inclusive**, underlining **job and income security**, as well as the trap of low-quality, low-pay jobs and the **importance of social rights** (page 5). Welfare system reform is thought around three trends: their adequacy and fiscal sustainability; their impact on job creation and incentives to work; their automatic stabiliser potential, to cushion macroeconomic shocks (page 5).

The Communication was accompanied by three annexes, the most important one being a [First Preliminary Outline of A European Pillar of Social Rights](#), which contains important commitments on a wide number of key topics, grouped under three main headings: **Equal opportunities and access to the labour market** (education and training, security of contracts, supporting transitions, work-life balance, gender equality and equal opportunities), **Fair working conditions** (employment rights, wages, health and safety, social dialogue), and **Adequate and sustainable social protection** (social benefits - minimum income, unemployment, health and sickness, disability, pensions; services - care, child-, health- and long-term care, housing, transport, energy, financial, communications).

Find all relevant information on EAPN's [website](#), including how to access the public consultation. EAPN will work closely with its members over the coming months to prepare a full response to the consultation and the initiative.

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

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

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

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

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

Write or e-mail the relevant contacts now (early 2016) and ask what process will be developed to involve stakeholders in the discussions on the Country Reports, the NRP and CSRs this year. Ask to be invited as one of the stakeholders representing anti-poverty organisations and working with people experiencing poverty. You should ask what form this engagement will take and whether you will be able to comment on a draft, or can send a separate contribution. You should insist on your Government's responsibility to ensure a meaningful, timely, and structured process of consultation and involvement. You will find useful the references supporting stakeholder involvement in European documents – please see the [Annex](#) at the end of this document (click on the link for quick access). EAPN's overall aim is not to be only involved in one-off consultations, but to build strong regular dialogue platforms – eg national platforms against poverty, where stakeholders regularly meet with Government representative to discuss progress on poverty reduction, and propose new actions. These should provide input to the Europe 2020 Strategy process, but not be limited only to it. See examples of [Good Practices](#) in the chapter below (click on the link for quick access).

3. Brief members and build a common position

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

4. Making your input: Developing key messages

Starting from the analysis and common position above, members should clarify the key weaknesses of your country's draft NRP against your list of what you consider key requirements. Given the short timeframe, you might not be provided with a draft NRP you can comment on, but only have the opportunity to provide written or oral input. Be prepared to send at short notice the key messages that you want to put forward, based on your analysis of the main trends. Sometimes, a few crucial points make more of an impact than a long list of demands. If you are able to see a draft, you will often have a very short time to respond. Having prepared your key messages beforehand will help you to be able to provide quick, but effective input within the tight deadlines. In preparing your position, look at your country's last year's National Reform Programme and Country Specific Recommendations and the recently released Country Reports. You can also refer to the joint EAPN review of the NRPs for [2011](#), [2012](#), [2013](#), [2014](#), and [2015](#), as well as members' shadow Country Specific Recommendations for [2012](#), [2013](#), [2014](#), and [2015](#). Another useful document is [EAPN's response to the Annual Growth Survey package](#). These may help you devise your key messages – although, in the end, each national context will be different.

5. Review your country's CSRs

In [2012](#), [2013](#), [2014](#), and [2015](#), EAPN members analysed the Commission's Country-Specific Recommendations, as well as their implementation, and developed their own alternative proposals. It is clear that the CSRs are increasingly important, impacting on national policy priorities. Compare the CSRs prepared by your Network for your country to those issued by the European Commission, commenting on how far the proposals are the same, and highlighting gaps, and also check the newly-released Country Reports. Prepare comments on the implementation of the CSRs – negative and positive points. Propose new Country-Specific Recommendations. This work will be carried out with the support for the Secretariat, by means of a pre-dispatched questionnaire fiche, as well as through the EU ISG meeting in March 2016. The resulting proposals will feed directly into the NRP process, at national and EU level: you should send your proposals to your Government, as part of your NRP and input to the Semester, but also to the other key interlocutors identified in this section. Find all relevant information in the [Who to Contact?](#) section below.

6. Build alliances

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

7. Disseminating your message and promoting public debate

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

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

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Suggestions for Alternative Inputs and Good Practices

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

1. EAPN's Joint Action Projects, 2015

In 2015, EAPN provided financial support to 5 of its National Networks to lead on pilot actions to help to increase motivation for members for engaging with Europe 2020 and the European Semester, trialling new activities that could help to raise awareness, build capacity, promote better involvement and get real impact. Joint proposals, between a leading and an associated National Network, were encouraged. The main objectives of the Europe 2020 National Pilot Actions Call were to:

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

The 5 pilot actions were delivered between April 1st and 31st December 2015. The Steering Group of EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group has selected the 5 pilot actions as follows: Croatia & Hungary, Portugal & Bulgaria, Serbia & Macedonia, Spain & Italy, and Ireland.

You can read all about the initiative, as well as descriptions and supporting documents and materials of each of the 5 pilots on the [dedicated page on the EAPN website](#).

2. EAPN's involvement with the Semester Alliance project

In 2014, EAPN led a project called the "[Semester Alliance](#)" (click to access the blog with full information), which built a cross-sectoral alliance among European NGOs, to work together and impact the European Semester and Europe 2020, from a social, equality, and environmental perspective. As a key part of the project, 3 national projects have been financed to pilot broad, cross-sectoral alliances to engage in the European Semester, all led by the EAPN National Networks in the respective countries – Bulgaria, Denmark, Ireland. These national alliances aimed to pilot a broad, cross-sectoral joint approach to national collaboration on Europe 2020 through the European Semester, with particular reference to joint engagement in the National Reform Programme (NRP), the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) and proposals to the Annual Growth Survey (AGS). The 3 National Networks built coalitions involving a broad range of organisations, including social, environmental/climate and/or other sectors in the 3 selected Member States, including the national members of the Brussels-based Semester Alliance. While the Alliance does not receive funding anymore, both the Brussels-level, as well as the national level cross-sectoral alliances continue their activities. See the blog for more information on each.

3. Attending meetings with your Government and the European Commission

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

EAPN Ireland

EAPN Ireland coordinated the Better Europe Alliance of Irish Civil Society Organisations for a Social and Sustainable Europe. This involves twelve organisations representing a range of social and equality NGOs, the Environmental Pillar and the SIPTU trade union. In July 2015 the Better Europe Alliance (see above) finalised and disseminated its comments on the 2015 CSRs for Ireland. This response was presented to the European Commission's European Semester Offices for Ireland and in the national parliament to the Joint Oireachtas (All Party) Committee on European Union Affairs. This Response and the Alliance's more detailed views were also the basis for a meeting with the European Commission's fact-finding Mission to Ireland in November 2015. Many members of the Alliance also attended various Commission events related to the European Semester including two focusing on housing and health and a workshop on the Commission's Country Report for Ireland. The ongoing relationship with the European Semester Officers has proved very important to the Alliance. EAPN Ireland made a direct submission to the 2015 National Reform Programme and the Better Europe Alliance's proposals for CSRs for 2015 were also included as a submission to Ireland's NRP.

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

EAPN Portugal

In January of 2015, EAPN Portugal received an invitation from the European Semester Officer in Portugal to participate in a meeting with the Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion Department. This meeting was developed within the "European Semester fact finding mission", and the main aim was to exchange information in terms of poverty and social exclusion state of play. The questions focused on issues like: the factors that contributed to the increase of poverty in Portugal; the groups more vulnerable to poverty; the situation of the minimum income schemes, especially the reasons that can explain the reduction in the number of the beneficiaries of social insertion income; the profile of people receiving this income; and the monitoring of these social measures. Followed this meeting, EAPN Portugal was also invited to participate in the ECFIN Seminar for Civil Society Representatives (March). In May there was a second meeting with the European Semester Office to debate national CSR and it was asked to EAPN Portugal to prepare a document on EAPN Portugal Opinion on Social Policy. All of these achievements demonstrate a more opened attitude of this Structure to the participation of Civil Society and we consider it is an important step. Consequently, the European Semester Office was also invited to participate in the national Pilot Project Europe 2020: More Participation, Better Governance and this was a positive input to reinforce the relationship with this Office and also to present key messages on poverty and social exclusion fight. At this level EAPN Portugal has presented in 2015 a report with guidelines for the definition of a National Strategy to Fight Poverty and Social Exclusion. We had also promoted different meetings with political parties and a Seminar in the National Parliament in May. After the publication of the Report, it was sent to all the local authorities and non-governmental organisations at national level and we have organized 2 public events (Porto/Lisbon) to disseminate this information among civil social and it was promoted a debate around the importance of this National Strategy to Fight Poverty and Social Exclusion.

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

EAPN Latvia

In February 2016, EAPN LV had the opportunity to participate in a stakeholder dialogue with civil society, organised in Brussels by DG ECFIN. This led to and facilitated a series of exchanges with key people working on the European Semester for Latvia, including MEPs, as well as the European Semester Officer, Mārtiņš Zemītis, who was very open to dialogue. This discussion kick-started closer future cooperation between the ESO and EAPN LV at a national level. This opportunity also afforded an exchange with the cabinet of Valdis Dombrovskis, the Latvian Commissioner for the Euro and Social Dialogue, as well as with Jānis Reirs, former Latvian Minister of Finance, and currently Minister of Welfare. The discussions were very fruitful and yielded useful and positive feedback. These high-level encounters in Brussels were instrumental in obtaining further meetings at the national level, as they reinforced EAPN LV's position as key interlocutor and expert on poverty and social exclusion issues. While it is still too early to judge if the quality of the engagement will remain the same, and if promised results will be delivered, it was nonetheless a very useful experience, which has laid the foundation for a debate on poverty and social exclusion in Latvia, as well as possible progress and strategic development for the future. For more information, please contact [Norberts Snarskis](#) (EAPN Latvia).

4. Other good practices

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

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

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

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

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

2. Shadow NRP or NSR / Other alternative reports

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

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

3. Developing National Platforms Against Poverty

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

4. Awareness raising on poverty and Europe 2020

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

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Who to Contact?

Europe 2020 Country-Specific Information

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

European Semester Officers

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

Country Desk Officers in DG Employment

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

Members of the Social Protection Committee

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

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

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

Members of the Employment Committee

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more information, please contact the EAPN Secretariat:

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

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Annex:

Useful References in EU Documents about Stakeholder Engagement

Europe 2020 Communication

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

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

and

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

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

Integrated Guidelines

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

While the Europe 2020 integrated guidelines are addressed to Member States and the Union, they should be implemented in partnership with all national, regional and local authorities, closely involving parliaments, as well as social partners and representatives of civil society.

The Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, contains identical wording in its Recital 9.

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

Annual Growth Survey

In **2016**, there is one explicit reference to civil society as a key stakeholder in Europe 2020:

Bringing recovery to a sustainable path and reviving the convergence process can only be achieved if all EU Institutions and Member States act together. This requires close involvement of the European and national Parliaments, social partners, national, regional and local authorities and the civil society at large. In line with its proposal set out in the Communication on completing the EMU, the Commission has engaged with the European Parliament prior to the presentation of this Annual Growth Survey.⁸ The European Parliament will continue to play its guiding role and provide political orientation on economic and social priorities. The role of national Parliaments is particularly valuable to strengthen democratic accountability, transparency and promote ownership of the reforms.

There are three more general references to stakeholders, where civil society is not explicitly mentioned, but which are nonetheless important, as they underline the commitment to increase ownership and implementation:

The Commission intends to engage in discussion with Member States and key stakeholders about the challenges faced and the optimal policy responses, by encouraging convergence towards the best performers.

and

The Commission looks forward to the views of the European Parliament as well as stakeholders at all levels to enrich the discussion and focus priorities for action.

and finally

The Commission has substantially streamlined the European Semester since last year, establishing more genuine dialogue with the Member States, for instance by engaging proactively with stakeholders at all levels

Proposal for a Council Recommendation accompanying the Country Reports

The main Communication does not contain any useful references, aside one to social partners in the section dedicated to **Adequate, well-designed and sustainable benefits and income support systems can support (re)employment:**

This requires a close cooperation between Public Employment Services, education and training systems, and social partners.

and one to stakeholders in general in the section **Preparation of the more fundamental reforms towards completion of EMU in stage 2 has been initiated:**

...a broad debate on the measures required in stage 2 of completing EMU is commencing, including through consultation with the European Parliament, national Parliaments and stakeholders.

Package on a European Pillar of Social Rights

In the Communication launching the consultation, a section is entitled Mobilising for the Debate, and includes the following wording:

In the coming months, the Commission will actively engage with other EU institutions, national authorities and parliaments, trade unions and business associations, NGOs, social service providers, experts from academia, as well as the public. At national level, the Commission will facilitate discussions through its Representations in the Member States, EU social partners will be invited to play an active role in shaping the Pillar. The Commission will also request the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee and of the Committee of the Regions.

The Annex on a First Preliminary Outline of the European Pillar of Social Rights only mentions social partners as sole interlocutors, and dedicated a section to them, regarding Social Dialogue and the Involvement of Workers, which says:

Social partners shall be consulted in the design and implementation of employment and social policies.

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

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

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



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