

European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) - Annual CONFERENCE 2016

16 June 2016

Conference Report

**From the Delors White Paper (1993) to the
European Pillar of Social Rights (2016),
what future for the fight against poverty!**

**EAPN's response - building on 25 years
combating poverty, inequality and exclusion**

Introduction

Objective of the Conference

The aim of the conference was to develop a concrete and timely input to the Commission consultation on A European Pillar of Social Rights. EAPN will build on its experience and insights into how such a Pillar could complement or build on the existing strategies such as: Europe 2020 and the European Semester and the Social OMC. The potential of the Pillar of Social Rights was explored and how this could contribute to the future role of the EU in the fight against poverty and social exclusion will be explored.

Background: On March 8 2016, the European Commission launched a public consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights. This was announced by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in September 2015, and is part of a greater initiative to strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), and, implicitly, its social dimension, by ensuring upward social convergence between Member States.

The initiative is targeted at the Eurozone, aimed at strengthening the Economic and Monetary Union, but other Member States can join if they want to. The reasoning is the strong economic interdependence in the Euro area. The legal nature of the Pillar is to be defined, as it will involve a number of different tools of a diverse nature, according to the content, subsidiarity principle, and overall legal EU framework.

Commitments in the consultation on the Pillar of Social Rights, come under three headings:

1. *equal opportunities and access to the labour market*: skills, active labour market policies, improving employability, supporting transitions;
2. *fair working conditions*: achieving balance between flexibility and security, facilitate job creation, promote social dialogue
3. *adequate and sustainable social protection and access to high-quality essential services*: childcare, healthcare, long-term care, to ensure dignified living and enable professional and social participation

Opening Plenary: Exchange on the European Pillar of Social Rights

Chair: Peter Kelly, Vice President EAPN: One of the important things of Delors paper was to set an agenda for Europe. We hope that the pillar of social rights can set a new agenda for Social Europe. From the UK we're acutely aware of these problems. There is a need to embed social rights across the EU. It's important we hear directly from people in poverty. We're also reflecting on 25 years of EAPN, with the people of PEP who've directly contributed, raising their voices and been listened through EAPN.



Video Statement: Genevieve Baert, Experience Expert and EAPN Belgium – Tribute to activists with direct experience of poverty and statement from 2015 PEP. Watch the video [here](#).

Presentation by Thyssen's Cabinet: Mrs Vasiliki Kokkori – substituting Alan Larsson

This video brings out perfectly all the key issues: that the EU is at a critical junction. Things are improving but poverty and inequality are very big problems. There is a disconnect between how we try to reduce poverty and what people see and think. There are 2 objectives – we need to close the gap with its citizens, to restore legitimacy, and 2nd we need to strengthen the social pillar, social rights and restore social fairness, to bring people back into the policy making process. I'm grateful for this event, I hope you can give us concrete ideas on how to take the pillar forward. It's at the heart of what EU is. Social progress is at the heart of the EU Treaties, based on our social models. There is a strong base of social rights, but we also face major challenges. I will say more about these:

- 1) New work patterns, digital, ageing. Before the crisis it was clear that the Labour Market and Social Protection systems were not working as they should. We had poverty before the crisis. The crisis didn't cause poverty. We need to understand what are the circumstances, before we decide what we do. We need to make them 'fit for purpose', and to make real opportunities for everybody to work and to participate. It's not about Europe, not an abstract concept. It's about EU, national level and about you and us – and how we take action. Putting the social dimension at the heart is the key. But this must be done at the most legitimate level – ie subsidiarity and proportionately.

- 2) Policies don't happen in a vacuum. So we must connect the different parts of policy ie inclusive growth and stability.
- 3) The consultation – we have 6 months left, but we must keep the momentum. We need to reach beyond Brussels and see the divergences – this is where EAPN is important. We are now in the 3rd month of the consultation. And clear messages are emerging. There is strong support for the social dimension, and consensus that it has acted poorly. But subsidiarity is an issue. EU must bring an added value, but recognize this is Member State's competence. All levels must take action. It must be performance for convergence – economic and social.



We need a new start! This means:

- We need to reflect why our systems (the best in the world) have already had shortcomings *before* the crisis. The crisis has only exposed the gaps.
- There is growing divergence across MS. Why?
- Globalization – what is the real effect on our society, our concept of work and labour markets.
- Demographic Ageing – we will have a ratio of 2 to 1 people working within a decade. This isn't sustainable....

What's the difference between now and what the pillar offers? – We must move from a silo approach to a more holistic strategy, to combat policies that are a barrier to economic growth. This means tackling a range of issues.

We see 3 key issues:

- Access to quality employment
- Transitions within work
- High levels of social protection

The first is about investing in people. The 3rd is social protection for all – also youth, including integrated social services – now there is a disconnect. The 2nd is to facilitate across transitions – education/work/unemployment different types of employment and for those who aren't.

What does it mean? There isn't any one solution – and we have to look at the short and long term. This means to be a framework for action: a social agenda. But it can't be one size fits all. The final outcome will depend on consultation. So actively participate – to help people in poverty to have a voice.

Are there issues that are missing? Be concrete and specific as possible.

We can't just have business as usual – we need to find a new way of speaking. Social systems have been weakened, with human capital, if we want to help Europe growth, we need to invest in people '(quote from Draghi). We need a new start and to work together.

Reflections, Comments, Questions: Initial responses from EAPN members:



Sérgio Aires, President EAPN

We would like to thank Mrs Kokkori, and to recognize the effort being made by the Commission, confirming that we will have the PEP meeting. Also for your enthusiasm, which is inspiring.

What we can do today is give you a flavour of the discussions this morning and some proposals.

- 1) To whom? Is it only the Eurozone or all of the EU?
- 2) Holistic? But what's the relationship with the other policies – ie are the rules of the EMU going to change? Are we going to challenge the Stability and Growth Pact, and policies that undermine and generate poverty?
- 3) Are we really going challenge the paradigm which is obsessed with competitiveness and are not inclusive?
- 4) Fit for purpose – but *what* purpose? ie convergence – but will it be up or down? The political context is far away from convergence – and *solidarity*. Will there be a more federal approach? Will we reinforce the social in this model?
- 5) We want to make some concrete proposals - for the short and long term. People are living in poverty, the numbers and intensity is growing - What will the European Commission do in the short term? Some concrete proposals:

- The engagement of PEP and NGOs should be a top priority. Consultation means meaningful participation. Already the process doesn't feel participative. Some of our members have already been involved with consultation meetings at the national level. And they feel that they are just being informed but not being listened to, not being taken seriously. They feel that they are just there to sign forms. If it's a real social agenda this is crucial.
 - We need an integrated EU strategy to combat poverty and promote inclusion.
 - There needs to be the launch of a large-scale inclusion programme – like the community initiatives– which can support grass-root social innovation.
 - The EU research agenda should be more open to Civil Society Organisations to work on this.
 - We must build on Europe 2020 and the SDGs
- 6) Final point - we'd like to know what's happening on Europe 2020 and the European Platform against Poverty. This also had a consultation process – and we never knew what happened and the follow up.

Elke Vandermeersch, EAPN BE/EUISG Co-Chair

I agree with Sérgio. These views were shared with EAPN's policy group: the EUISG. Similar questions were raised. There are a lot of questions. It is not clear for our members where this is going. There are a lot of concerns. Our starting point are voices from the ground. There is a strong feeling that they are not listened to. We miss a sense of urgency. At the same time, people are active in EAPN working trying to contribute – ie in the Mid Term Review of Europe 2020. But this isn't working. We need something else. If it really is about a new way of working – this we would be happy about. But we don't really see this 'new way' in the documents so far.

The first thing that's missing is that still the main focus is employment. Employment is a key tool to fight poverty. But the reality is that for a large number of people experiencing poverty, employment isn't the answer. They are too ill to work, or there are other reasons they can't be active in the labour market. We need other answers. We must use this opportunity to make concrete suggestions. This is a priority for us and EAPN - Adequate, accessible minimum income. We must make sure there is some real progress. We call for a framework directive on this.

We welcome the focus on social protection – the ILO social protection floor for example. Strong Social Protection systems are necessary to overcome the crisis, but then in other documents eg the CSRs – recommendations are mainly to 'modernize' these systems, which often means to weaken them. To what extent does the social pillar relate to other EU policies, what's the legal status? It can't just be a list of intentions. The document does cover a lot needs. But we need integrated approaches, strong implementation, and to make it binding. Enforceability is vital. There is a growing lack of confidence in Europe. The people experiencing poverty we work with are the ones who are interested in the EU. They want to

believe in Europe. They want to see a future for themselves and for Europe. But without these guarantees, we question the future of Europe....

We also see the negative consequences of the current economic policies. We need to ask a more fundamental question: will the social pillar put the social energy back into the market? what is the real purpose of the economy? Is it growth? To have a real impact, we need to shift the focus to recognize social rights as a goal in itself, not just an instrument for growth.

Alexander Kraake, EAPN DE/EXCO

We had a similar discussion – the economic perspective is the same paradigm. It's not got a social focus or social aims – only to achieve more growth. This is not a new approach. What we are hearing is the same. It's just a new packaging. Is the integration in the Labour Market the only solution? We are missing the analysis about the causes of poverty and social exclusion, also the prevention approach. Not just fixing what is broken. The developments in the labour market are becoming very dangerous, with growing precariousness and in-work poverty. So the labour market isn't the only solution. There are just not enough quality jobs with living wages and good conditions for everybody.

We would propose that this paradigm of paid work needs to be rethought. Minimum income schemes need to be strengthened and improved. The integration of vulnerable groups is very vague. There is also the question of short term solutions. What about refugee and migrants? These rights have to be for all people in Europe, but in the Communication it seems to refer to only migrants with legal status, so asylum seekers are out and undocumented people.

If we are serious about doing something in response to demographic change, we need migration and young people coming to Europe. So we must be very careful about this message

Inequality isn't mentioned. Where's the link to financial and economic policies? If you want to achieve upward convergence, then we need to look at these policies and make the link. A key question has to be how to generate more public income via fair taxation, Financial Transactions Tax?

Social services – most of us are working with social service providers, but we feel that this issue always comes at the end. Labour market comes first, and Social Services at the bottom. Social Services of General Interest are very important and can help social convergence. We need affordable access to high level services to be set by a framework. We need initiatives on this. The top priorities are social protection and essential services – but social services aren't there.

Interventions from the floor.

Mary/EWL; One thing that is welcome is the concept of rights. We've been living with a framework which overlooks rights. Eg equality between men and women. We have to hang onto this word and let it guide us. One question, within the current framework, the European semester – why aren't Social Impact Assessment and Gender Impact Assessment applied to economic policies?

Lithuania representative: I have contacted the ministry to ask what is Lithuania doing with this pillar? The answer was – nothing particularly, it is dealt with by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs! How will EU push this at the national level?

Mrs Kokkorou – reflections

- This is why we're here: to mobilize discussions at the national level, encouraging stakeholders to take it to the national level. So you should go back to him and ask him again.
- What is the link to other pillars – economic, fiscal and environmental? All of them should work together – this is what we want to do.
- The issue of Growth – Growth should be about prosperity – it is about people. It's for people to have opportunities. It's about how to make better business with better quality jobs.
- Europe 2020 – last spring there was a communication. This made clear that the poverty target is relevant.
- We *are* focussed on practical short-term measures as well. For example 1 billion pre-financing was made available for the youth guarantee, to tackle long-term unemployment – but we need to involve stakeholders, to help people to enter the labour market
- We agree that the labour market is not the solution for everybody – modernizing means having sustainable social investment, protecting and enabling people.
- We have a skills agenda which is about investing in people. We aim to give them basic skills to work. Now they are in precarious jobs. This must change.
- We want to make taxation systems equitable – things are not in silos.
- Migration – every asylum seeker is allowed to participate in Labour market after a set period.
- We know there are gaps, that's why we want your input. Give us track changes – just put it there.

Peter Kelly/Chair: The issue of inclusive growth is very important. We've had growth but poverty and inequality have increased at the same time. Growth in itself doesn't have an impact. We need to make sure that we growth does genuinely benefit people, and help people to escape from poverty.

The modernisation of social protection. Our experience at national level is that this often means a reduction – ie UK it has been a real attack on social rights.

Freek/FEANTSA: You said that social rights won't necessarily be standing alone. You mentioned some of them. But for homeless – we don't want to accuse the Commission – there is a systematic overlooking of the most excluded. The Long-term package, disability, ESF, even the poverty target – overlooks the homeless – they are missed. The Social rights pillar is a fantastic opportunity to bring them in. Homeless people can exist as rights holder.

Maria/EAPN Bulgaria: The name of the conference is interesting - but we need some answers, where are we going? Is this a period of progress? Or a period of social regression. We need to

understand this. From the indicators, we have achieved a long downward trend of convergence. Just look at one indicator: the growing rate of inequality from 1975. We have to address the policies that have contributed to this situation, and derive lessons if we really want to do this, when we make our social pillar. Are we going to base this social pillar on neo-liberal policies and keep them the same? Or do we recognize that these policies have worsened the societies we live in. With this, we see the intentions. In the document, the directions are not defined. It could lead to improvement or it could get worse. For example, wages only address minimum wages, and do not question the rules. So with the Youth guarantee. Most young people don't want these bad jobs. So they vote with their feet. They leave. This is about decent labour conditions.

If we make rules for the public deficit share, we can also make rules about the share of wages – this is new thinking. (Applause from the audience)

A few years of ago, it was equal pay for equal work. Now this is forgotten. It's not in EC documents. There are also regional discrimination issues. It is important that there are national competences, but in Brussels – let's focus on EU competences and seeing what is possible. Flat taxation was monitored by the World Bank, and the EU institutions never said this. Without a proper inclusive and redistributive framework for taxation there is no social pillar.



Claire/ Eurocarers: I want to raise the issue of informal carers. These people are outside social protection and are vital! And they are facing poverty and social exclusion. The Commission supports flexible patterns of work – but it shouldn't just be about the labour market. What about people who are not in working age? Or for whom working is not an option? These can

be young or old carers. They need support, developed through adequate income and social services support.

Mrs Kokkoro response: We must talk about the other pillars:

- of course there has been social regression, but there also has been progress. For example on women rights, discrimination, health and safety, posting workers directive. We need to be fair if we are to move forward.

- Austerity has had an impact. But in the Semester, the main policy coordination cycle – you can see a difference. There is now more democratic involvement ie social partners and NGOs. We know there is still more to be done. But we must compare with before, compared to last year. We are trying to ensure sustainability and adequacy. It won't change overnight, but must continue.

- There are things the EU can't do. The social pillar is about taking action at the appropriate level – eg wages and conditions have to be set in the national context.

Further reactions from the participants

Kart/Estonia: We must control how the money is spent – Youth Guarantee doesn't work – In Estonia many live in town and villages, where the local authorities don't have capacity to find work for them, because the jobs don't exist.

Sérgio/Portugal: If Social Impact Assessment is being done, we are not doing the best we can. The Youth guarantee was used to finance precarious jobs in Portugal. We need some measures to monitor these programmes in an independent way. We have good strategies on children, on Roma ... we should make sure they are implemented in the short-term.

Graciela/ EAPN ES: I was explaining the other day to a group the social model in Europe and the question came back: we have a charter of fundamental rights? Why do we need a social pillar of rights?

Mary/EWL: Work-life balance consultation – will this feed into the social pillar? What's the approach to coordinate the strategies – eg disability, gender rights etc.

Paul/EAPN Ireland: What ideas are around to engage employers about their role?

Mrs Kokkoro response

- In many cases, the rights are there but they are not implemented. They don't translate into real life – policy and funds.
- EU union has given a lot of guidance – for specific groups, so these must be connected.
- We are not just concerned with the supply side, but the demand side. We must talk to the employers and help to create jobs. We need to find a meaningful way to talk to the business community.

Richard/EAPN France: In the CSRs in France, they go in the direction of lowering wages. We have the EU pillar of social rights – so we find these contradictory.

Mrs Kokkoro.: We presented an Action Plan on the Integration of refugees and migrants. The EU has set a framework and supports MS in this area – ie measures to support essential services, housing and social, support to employment. This is about our legal obligations.

We are aware. I think you will find that the CSR talks about improving competitiveness. It doesn't say lower wages....

Session 2: The future role of the EU in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and the potential of the proposal on an EU Pillar of Social Rights

Chair: Jasmina Kronic, Vice President EAPN

Maria João Rodrigues, MEP S&D Group Vice-President in charge of Economics & Social Policies (rapporteur of Parliament report on the Social Pillar)



It is an excellent opportunity for me to be here; as a member of the EP and vice-president of the S&D, I am in charge of economic and social policies and my group proposed that I become rapporteur for the European parliament on the EPSR. Besides from putting forward my vision, I am also here to hear from you, as I am just starting with this task, which is very challenging I would like to hear new ideas from you. Getting ideas is the main reason I am here for.

Some of the participants in this room were together with me at the turn of the century, in 2000, when the anti-poverty policies were secondary and marginal compared to economic

policies and then we had the presidency of the EU who proposed to all governments – to develop an anti-poverty strategy in Europe. I toured Europe and the reaction I got was that anti-poverty is not a usual topic for European Affairs conversations, this is not on our usual EU agenda. We managed to have this recognized in the conclusions of the EU Council and then we started a political process and pushed for the development of new tools and tasks. Our agenda was confronted with a neoliberal agenda dominant in EU and we are still paying the price for this.

Now we have a new proposal coming from the EC – building up an EPSR – this panel is to discuss the potential of this idea, what we can do with this. This is a very important topic, an important initiative. We have the proposal coming from the European Commission but we have different ways to make the best of this proposal and how we can make it work. What approach would bring the best out of the first concept of the EPSR.

Why do we need the EPSR?

- The first reason is that everybody in the EU has the right to a decent life and this right is enshrined in the EU treaties but it is not being delivered and we need to make sure that EU treaties apply.
- There is a political reason as well– the support to the European Union project is declining, there is frustration and anger with the EU and we need to recognize this. Europe does not deliver on its promises. In order to overcome the political lack of confidence, political crisis in the EU we have to address social inequalities and social unfairness. Otherwise we will have movements claiming that the best way is going back to national borders. I believe EU is needed for us, the citizens, to cope with many challenges, global challenges such as climate change for which we need to identify new energy solutions to cope with; this type of challenges can only be dealt with by using the EU scale. Let's not be trapped into this simplistic discourses developed by those who want to go back to national borders.
- There is an economic reason that we should use as well – we have to recognize that social inequalities are increasing and undermining the possibility for economic recovery, for growth and for everyone to have a good future.
- The need to imagine another approach – I think EAPN was effective in putting in motion on the ground a powerful approach saying that if you want an active inclusion strategy we need to combine 3 main elements : access to quality jobs, access to quality services, the need to have min income support, providing a living. We are being challenged by a new era in the field of industrial policy and jobs creation – the current talk about 4.0 industry which is indicating that we are in the changing era of organizing social protection. The next generation of anti-poverty strategy & policies – should be bold and say that we need to develop a life cycle approach – starting with children and addressing different social risks all over the life cycle – for children, youth, unemployed youth, working poor, long term unemployed, senior workers, pensioners and elderly. Moreover we should address all problems related to discrimination for other reasons. We need an integrated approach and put together all policies which will enable us to go to the root of the issues. This approach is a combination of access to education, training, social protection, health care, housing and access to new types of services - financial services, energy provision we need

a new, comprehensive and integrated approach about how to address social inequalities. We also need to be precise when it comes to assessing the adequacy of these solutions – the quality of services – which means knowledge, expertise, and skills. Dealing with people is the most skilled work sector, more than financial markets or other technical sectors.

- If we discuss about developing perhaps one of the most important activity sector for next years in Europe, the sector dealing will people and tackling social inequalities I would like to make two points:
 - One, this is the sector dealing with people and tackling social inequalities and it involves different and many types of services. It means a need to build a real strategy to develop these sector, a capacity building strategy because we need to develop a lot of skills. Let us envisage this as a big sector for Europe where many jobs can be created.
 - The second point is about sustainability – we will be told that this is very expensive and financially not affordable. This argument will be made and there are two ways to deal with the problem of financial sustainability. One is to downsize the costs and the other one is to consider this as a big investment in our societies and if we want to invest in this than we need a strategy to make it sustainable. And the first factor to make it sustainable is to raise the employment rate and to raise active participation. To sustain a comprehensive welfare system, we need to reduce unemployment. Then we need to make sure that in the discussion on fiscal consolidation there is enough room for manoeuvre for social investment, which we will need to show is a strategic investment in our societies. We need to argue that to sacrifice social investment for financial deficit is wrong.

If we take this approach I believe that the pillar should be translated into clear targets for different key groups and the pillar should be translated into necessary instruments – legislative instruments, policy frameworks and most important of all the right type of financial instruments. And this means the right type of fiscal policy and the right use of structural funds and of the European Investment Fund which was created also to support social investment, which is one of the three key priorities of the European Social Investment Fund. We need new solutions for the euro zone that creates many divergences, social divergences and need to stop this and replace it by convergence, upward convergence. The Eurozone should also count on a particular fiscal capacity, complementing legislation existing at national level. This is the tool box we should build.

Reflections on the Potential of the Pillar proposal

Heather Roy, Secretary General, Eurodiaconia

Quoting Sérgio Aires, If you have a pillar, it is usually holding something up and if does not, it then turns into a monument and monuments just stand there and people admire them but nothing happens. Therefore we are slightly concerned with what the Social Pillar is holding up so it is active and dynamic and does not become another monument to the Social Pillar we want and never get to. We have some reservations but on the other hand we would like to

see that the EPSR becomes part of a fundamental paradigm change of the model of social development that we have in the European Union but I think we are not there yet. However we have some time and hopefully some enthusiasm and ambition to develop a Social Pillar that we all want to.

Eurodiaconia has been looking at the Social Pillar and has been consulting with its members and one of the areas we are really interested in is social protection and social services. Whereas we do see social protection mentioned in the social pillar, we are concerned that there is a missing element which is the analysis of the relationship between the adequacy and sustainability of social protection. And even if economic and social poles are portrayed as two sides of the same coin we have noticed that there are tensions when implementing them in practice and that social policy always seems to be the one that has to be cut when there are problems concerning sustainability. We have to see what other things need to be looked at in order to maintain sustainable social protection. The added value of social sustainable protection is often forgotten and it is those added values like equity, accessibility and quality of social protection that remain important. So for us for the social pillar to become the key initiative and promote this idea of upwards social convergence in the years to come, it is imperative that the adequacy of social protection is not constantly undermined by fiscal concerns and that development model, that paradigm shift will actually come.

Implementation of the Social Pillar:

- we can look at the pillar, and there are many things written in the document that are quite clear and some very good points made but the question is how to implement it?
- Mrs Rodriguez referred to the idea of clear targets for different groups, I am slightly sceptical of that, as we have a target of reducing poverty by 20 million by year 2020 and we do not seem to be able to meet that target. I am thus concerned that if we come up with more targets our Member States would not commit to them. I would like to have more targets but I would really like to have more commitment from Member States and actually have them doing something to meet them.
- There is the potential of using the European Semester that great mechanism that we have all been trying to battle with over the last few years, the semester could be a tool to operationalize principles that are outlined in the Social Pillar; it is unlikely that there will be a new mechanism, we have to use what we already have, the semester could be the place to do that and it could be the possibility to rebalance social and economic objectives within the semester process. We should have it centered on the current governance process and not create something new.
- Regarding the implementation of the ESPR, it should not be just another reporting mechanism, but it should drive concrete action. Implementation means what are the actual actions and policies that will be introduced to achieve the rights and for people to hold the rights declared in the pillar.
- If social investment or investment in social infrastructure is so important, and we believe it has economic and social returns why do we not make sure that social spending is exempt from some of the budgetary monitoring mechanisms that we have in the European Union; if we really believe that such spending is absolutely

critical for the development of our societies than we must make sure that no Member state is penalized for wanting to invest in social infrastructure. That is a complex process to go through but I think it is worth talking about, I think that education could be concerned, healthcare could be concerned, social protection could be concerned, we must look at it as a way to ensure we are not forced in a race to the bottom through our economic governance;

- Social services – Eurodiaconia is very interested in social services because many of our members work on social services and provide social services; we see social services in the document but only in relation to long term. Our view is that social services improve the quality of all people's lives and is not just for specific people, we all need social services for different times in our lives. We would like to see that services get a stronger place in the pillar and we are contributing that to the consultation, but also that we see services are there that are accessible, affordable and are at a high quality so we also need to look at the financing of services but we also need to consider that services support job creation, we need more social services in our society and we can create more jobs in the sector if it is invested in well.

Freek Spinnewijn, Director, FEANTSA

First comment – call for pragmatism and realism. There is a tendency when an opportunity arises to put all our ambitions and expectations in it and because of this, we sometimes kill its potential. The EPSR might produce some progress but will not produce massive social progress and we have to be realistic about that.

Some of the few reasons for being realistic are:

- The Political context in the EU – Euroscepticism exists and Eurosceptics will not disappear if you give more power to the EU but on the contrary.
- The issue of subsidiarity – it is a reality that some actions cannot be taken at EU level.
- Big on big, small on small – there are windows with opportunity but we have to be careful about how to use them. If we put too many things on it, it might not fit through the window. There is a number of EU actions – a number of pieces of legislation in the EU and I am under the impression that we want to fit everything under the social pillar. Will it not make it unattainable?
- Benchmarks – I read the communication and tried to understand what it is exactly. One thing that is clear is that benchmarks will be in it one way or another. Benchmarks related to the twenty rights that are listed. Are we not afraid of benchmarks? I see a list of rights there and are we confident that throwing it in the political arena is a good idea? I see the right to minimum income in there and yesterday I was in a meeting in the European parliament, in the Employment Affairs Committee, and there was a question about whether we should mention the 60% of the median income as a benchmark, and it was a simple question. We should not underestimate that. We have to think about how to stop this race to the bottom.

- Instead of throwing the debate in the political arena we should make more use of the international jurisprudence – there are a lot of cases from the European Court of Human Rights, the European Court of Justice, the Committee of Social Rights of the Council of Europe, there is case law out there and in the case law there are norms set by judges. We did an exercise (my organisation works on housing rights), and we listed all the case law that relates to the right to housing and we were amazed about how many norms are already set in there; in relation to the quality of shelter, access to shelter, what you can do in the case of evictions and repossessions, etc. there already is out there. I think that if we use the case law and come with some benchmarks related to the norms that are set in the case law, you will at least have the certainty that there is a minimum that the political debate will not go under that minimum. I have never heard a minister saying I want to go under the minimum standards set by international case law.
- If this document is serious about rights, social rights we have to make sure that the most excluded are rights holders. The constituency that we represent – the homeless are systematically outside of the scope of the EU scope of policy action. They are even excluded from EU poverty targets because the targets are measured in such a way that the homeless are out of the targets. The European Pillar of Social Rights is about rights so we have to make sure that everybody holds these rights.



Phillipe Seidel, AGE Platform Europe

- Positive that the European Commission talks about rights because in the last months we have heard Commission officials talking more about principles and values rather than rights. What does it mean to say that something is a right? A social right is

considered at national level a field of intervention with three dimensions – the protection of the right against third parties, the respect of the right – the state itself has to respect the right and promotion of the right – people do not have access to a right immediately, you need to have a plan and also resources in order to make sure that people can access that right. This concerns benchmarks, I feel that the discussion focuses a lot on benchmarks, which means there is a lot of focus on the third dimension but not so much on the first two.

- How to avoid race to the bottom once we have a benchmark? One idea is to set it at a level that no one has attained it, no one is over the benchmark but under and everyone has an incentive to go upwards. In the framework of the active age index, it has been done by looking at all the active aging indicators like for example employment of older people, and all other areas of life and they calculated a virtual country with all highest levels which makes the benchmarking very high. It makes things very visible and easy to compare. It implies benchmarks and indicators involves that everything is visible and public and people refer to them. This is where our question mark is – we already have benchmarks, we have social indicators, we have the social scoreboard in the semester but we do not see how it influences decisions. Because it is not a benchmark that is linked to action and there are no processes through which sanctions can be applied if benchmarks are not being met. It is an interesting process but where to fit it in the European Semester, the Stability and Growth Pact etc.
- There are a lot of interesting rights inside, many of them are very innovative but we need resources in order to make them accessible.
- I will only chose a few rights to comment on and one of them is the right to long term care, it is the first time at European level there is something such as long-term care risk or social protection risk. Most of the time it is just families taking care of this risk and in some member states is the healthcare system. It is positive that is already there. What does it mean? We need people to take care of people. It is something that goes beyond the framework of rights. What we need to build with this pillar is social inclusion.
- The right to lifelong learning – older people are the most excluded from this right, as this is linked to access to the labour market and only the ones participating in the labour market are included but what about the ones who do not participate in the labour market, they do not have the right to learn, to build their talents? This right should be accessible to everyone and should not be linked to access to the labour market.
- To conclude, we wish that the European Pillar of Social Rights has some success and some impact but we are also realistic about what this initiative can achieve.

Reflections, Comments, Questions from the floor: Initial responses from EAPN members:



Paul Ginnell, EAPN Ireland, EAPN Europe Inclusion Strategies Group

- Key highlight – social and economic policies have to be integrated, they must work together; it is important to focus on social rights in the pillar but we also must address the impact of economic policy and the link between economic policy and social outcomes. The poverty and inequality impact assessment is a key mechanism and at the same time would put a break on negative policy development and it is important for identifying important ways for improving the situation in terms of poverty and social exclusion.
- Another important area is taxation especially in relation to social protection and employment, this area needs to be looked at in a holistic way, from our point of view it is not just about employment and social policy but economic policy as well and a holistic approach to how we address the development of the pillar social rights.
- Another idea that was mentioned earlier as well is how we can have an integrated anti-poverty strategy through the European Pillar of Social Rights, an integrated strategy that fights poverty, social exclusion and inequality. Taxation and other areas are part of that but adequate income for all, and access to quality services and jobs are also part of the process. As we have heard now the focus is on labour market integration, labour market access, that is important but there must be a more integrated approach that is implemented.
- Another area, that was mentioned in the workshop as well is the Sustainable Development Goals and how will they be achieved towards 2030, we need to look at how we integrate the approach to the EPSR in this process also.

- The key issue is that we do not reject what we already committed to, Europe 2020 strategy – there are a number of commitments in there that have not been achieved and have not been met and we need to think how the pillar supports us to achieve targets that are already in place.
- This is an important opportunity for us but we should not be too expectant, and at the same time engage with this opportunity as much as we can.

Marija Babovic, EAPN Serbia, EAPN Europe Inclusion Strategies Group



- The European Pillar of Social Rights is strongly oriented towards labour market policies and this leaves out quite a large proportion of the population who is not active on the labour market, therefore the situation of those who are already excluded from the labour market will not improve with the proposals made in the EPSR.
- From all the policies presented today, we heard that growth is about people but if we look at EU policies we always see the question “how to generate growth?”, we hardly see the question, if at all, how to use growth to bring wellbeing to people.
- What is the future role of the European Union – countries are very different of course but there should be included in the EPSR something about solidarity and some minimum social floor should be set if we want to achieve progress. As we saw in the past, when we try to generate more economic growth and we are only focused on developing a monetary European Union, we fail. The EPSR has the intention to bring a more social Europe but we cannot see the direct results.
- We want to see in the EPSR a stronger coordination role for and stronger links with CSOs as they work closely with and represent the interests of marginalized people and thus should have a stronger role. We would also like to have a stronger role for EAPN and develop concrete actions, which is not easy as we do not have enough resources.

- We find the proposals made in the EPSR good but we do not know what impact they will have, so we request to have an impact analysis related to poverty and inequality of the different policy domains
- We also require to have more transparency because what we hear now is that we have to believe that some trends are happening but we need transparency about results and about the impact of different policies.
- Social pillar is ok but it is not an anti-poverty pillar nor a strategy so we still need an integrated anti-poverty strategy on fighting poverty. One last aspect, from citizens' point of view, it is time to deliver, and trust should be gained and that can only be done through successful policies that achieve real impact in terms of improving peoples' lives.

Reflections from the participants

Kart Mere, EAPN Estonia: My main concern about EPSR is not only its implementation but we always talk about values and people's right but in some countries we are facing acute problems such as homelessness, lack of access to food, school drop outs and their number is constantly increasing. We see people having to use foodbanks because they cannot afford food, how is the EPSR going to be useful in these situations. When the Social Investment Package was launched we had the same hopes. We do not have so much time anymore. People living in extreme poverty do not have time, they have the right to demand better lives. We always talk about Member States but which authority? The Government, the Parliament, whom should I ask about progress made on the Social Pillar?

Mary Collins EWL. We must insist that there is a very strong gender dimension in the EPSR – women represent half of the population of the planet and are more exposed to poverty in every phase of their life cycle. The EPSR could be an opportunity to smash the glass ceiling when it comes to wages and pensions and employment more generally. If we do not integrate a gender dimension in the EPSR that we will only reproduce cycles of poverty at different levels. There is a huge backlash in women's right and we must address that, women's rights are attacked in nowadays societies through populism and other phenomena and the EPSR could be an opportunity to place gender at the heart of social rights.

Response: Maria Joao Rodrigues, MEP – we are dealing with many hard problems but we need to come up with a vision of hope and confidence starting with the assumption that a society is much better for whatever the purpose and we do not accept to be excluded. This is the starting point we should use.

I used to be the Minister of Social Affairs in Portugal and dealt with all these problems and then came to the conclusion that to tackle the root of the problems we have to change economic policies. Now this is truer than ever. This time we need to build up a social pillar that will put pressure to change economic policy. Otherwise we can do an incredible work on the ground and we can solve many problems but the harsh reality of poverty and inequality can only be changed through economic policies. In this process of developing the EPSR I am talking with both ministers of social affairs and ministers of finance, they are both involved in

the process and my plan is to use this process to rebalance the relationship between economic and social policies.

If we have the poverty rate and the unemployment rate increasing, we cannot accept the minister of finance saying this country is on the right path. If at the same time we increase poverty and unemployment and different forms of social exclusion something is fundamentally wrong. We need a different kind of policy. If a minister of finance is worried about macroeconomic imbalances, we should be worried about microeconomic and social imbalances.

If you see that poverty and unemployment rates are increasing, you need to tell your government and European Institutions in Brussels that we need to change the road. We should have the means to implement the right kind of social measures, we should have the fiscal strength which can mean different taxation policies or dealing differently with financial problems in the banking sector. The EPSR is something that could be used to rebalance a framework which is not fair. If we need to change social and economic policies to tackle these problems, it means that we are coming to the issue of resources and they have to come from the national level through taxation – we need to stop tax evasion in Europe. We cannot accept tax evasion in Europe anymore and moreover we have to complement these resources with a good use of structural funds and to make sure that the recently developed Plan for Strategic Investment really covers social investment.

In a Eurozone where social inequalities are constantly increasing, something needs to be done. The Eurozone needs to count on a proper budget. If we really want to go to the heart of the problem of poverty and social inequality, these are the new instruments that we have to build up.



Further Questions from the Floor

Sonia Leemkuil, EAPN Netherlands – I do not agree with the statement that we have to create more jobs to reduce poverty. How many long term and well paid jobs can we create? Stop volunteer jobs and we will have a lot of jobs again. People lose their jobs and they can get only back as volunteers. Since 2015 NL tries to create jobs for people with disabilities and people who have been distanced from the labour market. Jobs are there only while state subsidies are there, when subsidies stop, the jobs stop.

I see there are a lot of discussions on housing. What happened with social housing? What has been happening with it in the NL and in Europe? What happens with people who lose their jobs and cannot pay for their houses? They become homeless. The Dutch government claims that there is no poverty in the Netherlands, how can you talk about unemployment and its consequences in this case? Thus statistics should be more honest and should stop covering the reality of unemployment and low paid jobs. We need to take action and change our social policies now and not in 2030.

Anne van Lanker – policy coordinator of EMIN

- I would first like to thank the people who contributed to this panel because finally we got from a session that was asking questions to a session where we got to formulate ideas of our own to be put on the Social Pillar and I think that is key.
- I would like to support what Paul Ginnell from EAPN Ireland said that we have been around for a long time and contributed to other processes initiated by the European Commission but I think we have to believe in our own voices, because this Commission and president Junker said that this is the Commission of the last chance when he took office.
- I would like to thank Maria Joao for giving these good reasons for why there should be a Pillar of Social Rights at EU level. You mentioned three Maria, a treaty that guarantees decent life to everybody, political support is declining and economically, inequalities are detrimental. I would like to add something else to this. If you look at the staff working document by the European Commission, you will see that until the crisis there is a clear convergence in Europe, also in the social areas, poverty declined in EU members states, and it stopped in 2008 and this happened because some social welfare arrangements were not strong enough but also because some mechanisms stopped working. There was a stability pact of the fiscal compound that stopped member states acting in their own rights in social areas so this is another reason why we need a Pillar of Social Rights at European level that at least should be as strong as the stability pact of the fiscal compound.
- What should be in the EPSR and here I agree with what Graciela Malgesini from EAPN Spain said, we should not redo the EU chart of fundamental rights but let's use the pillar to make these rights more concrete, more tangible especially in those areas where the European Union does not have strong legislative competencies because there we can have laws and directives and let's not replace directives with good and nice looking words.

- In the welfare state arrangements of the member states there should be benchmarks, and to the speakers who emphasized the importance of benchmarks in their presentations I would like to say that yes, we have benchmarks in the Europe 2020 strategy but only on the outcomes. What if we focus for once on policy measures that can lead to benchmarks, maybe that would create the sort of benchmarks that are useful in this process. For instance on poverty what do we know that is good leverage to ensure people decent lives?
- Two questions for Maria Joao:

Do you think that the pillar should deal with policies areas where EU legislation is still possible?

And in which way do you think that the EPSR could be put to a minimum to act as a macro-social imbalance procedure?

Sérgio Aires, EAPN President: subsidiarity should work hand in hand with solidarity. To what concerns the understanding of poverty, we feel like we are living back into the 80s where people experiencing poverty are just a consequence of the economic model that we have and we should get used to it. We put forward to our governments the recommendations discussed here but it did not create any reaction. The economic governance that we have determines everything. This is really the last opportunity that we have as citizens to do something before a disaster. Urgent measures are needed.

Response from Maria João Rodrigues

Final comments for today – thanking for the opportunity to work with EAPN. A follow up should be organised – I think that the story about the pillar is about a major goal, which is to save the European project. There is no hope for the EU project if social inequalities increase. What is at stake for me is to have strategies to mobilise citizens and stakeholders to rebalance the way EU is working. We have to be precise about our choices. I believe that we need to make some follow up on identifying the targets and benchmarks with an updated approach. We need something else about this and we also need to translate them into practical instruments to correct the situation, we need to address the flaws – we need to rebalance the EU semester, macroeconomic imbalances and get the adequate financial means through taxation policy. We have the role of fiscal policy, which is very important. If you want powerful action this is the one but it cannot work if we do not mobilize citizens and EAPN's role is crucial for this purpose.

Concluding Plenary and next steps

Stefan Olsson, Director Employment, DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, European Commission



Not much to add to this very interesting sessions but there are a few things I would like to highlight. EPSR is an initiative of the president of the Commission. This is not a DG employment initiative but something that comes from the top and has to be implemented by the whole EC. The timing is very important, despite the complex situations on social affairs this spring, the president wanted to have this adopted as early as possible so the EC could come up with an initiative in the beginning of next year. It would come before we start with next year's semester process which again ties in with the balance of social and economic financial issues and we address and it is also important because it comes before the white paper on the future of the EMU (Economic and Monetary Union), which is an important document for the whole economic governance of the EU. Thirdly it will come at a time when it can be taken into account in the discussion on the multi-financial perspectives so the budget for the years to come. Thus we have an initiative by the president, focusing on the social which can be a compass steering all other initiatives coming is important. In the light of the presentations and discussions held earlier, it would be good to address the balance of economic and social policies.

You do not have to always start, as we often do in different fora at European level, with the question what is EU competence and what is not. The EPSR is an important opportunity to express ourselves and say what we and you as EAPN and other organisations, think that the

outcome should be. And then, in a second step we could say what action the EU, the members states, the regional and local levels should take. First we have to think where we want to go and think of competences later. It is important to define where you want to go, what are the key issues in terms of combatting poverty and then from there on looking at the means of doing that. I think this is an intellectual and pragmatic way to deal with the pillar. It is important not to let ourselves be blocked by the question what competence do you have but first define a goal, a vision and then think of how it can be achieved.

Graciela Malgesini, EAPN Spain

In your viewpoint what are the red lines, boundaries of this? It is indeed interesting to think on how to achieve together our goals. Member States will not be happy to have their competences overpassed by the EC. Which are the red lines for you?

Stefan Olsson, EC

I do not see any redlines. You need to define what is the Europe that you want, that you believe in. After describing what you want, it is important to define your priorities for the EU level and then for the national level. For the step at the EU level, you should be careful not to have a too long wish list because it loses its power. The goal for Europe is not to have, not to accept inequality and exclusion and the action that the EC should develop is to balance social and economic policies. It is important to keep the demands focused.

Freek Spinnewijn, FEANTSA

EPSCO adopted today conclusions on poverty. Read those conclusions and you will see where the red lines are. They say we have to do mutual learning but it does not go much further than that and that will not help.

Free movement is EU competence – there are 10 000 EU citizens homeless in another country. We have been trying for years to have a reaction from the European Commission and we still have not got an answer. This is to say that even for issues where competences are very clear, it is difficult to make progress. I would just like to reinforce the message that I already presented earlier that it is important to be sharp in our demands and keep them focused.

Sérgio Aires, EAPN President

It is good to remember that EPSR is a president's initiative. It is difficult to mobilise people in this room to participate in the consultation on the EPSR because we are burned out. It is difficult to find the energy to go back home, at the national level and do this job. We need to wait for some urgent signs to mobilise people, we cannot do it on the basis of paper. Let's talk about concrete things like for example the minimum income directive. If we keep the economic governance as it is and we do not change the paradigm to go from economic governance to welfare governance, I am very pessimistic about the impact on reducing poverty and social exclusion.

Regarding the contribution to the EPSR, EAPN has already started to bring its input to the social pillar last year in November, with the PeP meeting and will continue to work on it both

at European and national level. Based on the outcome of the discussions we have had these days here in Brussels, EAPN will elaborate its response to the consultation on the Social Pillar.

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