

12th June 2015

To: Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs

Open Letter to the EPSCO Council: June 2015
Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) and Guidelines step back on poverty,
sideline social objectives and Europe 2020

Dear Minister,

We are writing to you on behalf of EAPN, the European Anti-Poverty Network, the largest and oldest platform of anti-poverty organizations in Europe, representing more than 6000 organisations across 31 countries.

At the EPSCO meeting on the 18-19 June, you will discuss the new developments in the European Semester: the Commission's CSR proposals and the negotiations on the Integrated Guidelines. As the Commission has carried its orientation debate on Social Europe on the 9th June, a clear message was given by Commissioner Dombrovskis and Commissioner Thyssen of the need to put 'economic policies on a par with social policies' with a coherent vision of a Triple AAA rating for social dimension, and a recognition that although quality job creation was a priority, investment in strong social protection systems, with benchmarking to ensure adequate minimum income was essential.

These good intentions risk remaining empty words unless this balanced approach is first and foremost explicitly reflected in the European Semester – particularly in the CSRs and in the guidelines, reintegrating a balanced smart, sustainable and inclusive vision from Europe 2020, with real priority to economic and social policies that can achieve the poverty and other social targets.

1) Commission CSR Proposals reduce focus on poverty and social targets

EAPN is deeply concerned about the new 2015 CSR proposals, and how far it reflects a negative shift away from social objectives and targets of Europe 2020. The new Commission CSRs have been produced in a lighter format, with a reduced number of CSRs, with the supposed intention of increasing the coordination of policy. ***However, it is difficult to see how this so-called simplification of CSRs can be considered an improvement in the methodology particularly when concrete mention of the targets and commitments of the Europe 2020 strategy are missing.***

The latest CSRs give **an even lower profile to poverty and social objectives, as well as to the framework of Europe 2020, with a reduction of poverty CSRs from 12 to only 6**, at a time when poverty affects 1 in 4 of the EU population, with poverty *increasing* in 2/3 of Member States. Instead of balanced economic and social objectives, the dominant CSRs continue to press for austerity, resulting in cuts in social spending rather than social investment, with no visible link to the inclusive or sustainable growth agenda of Europe 2020. Although some of

the poverty recommendations incorporate some individual positive measures ie on adequacy of minimum income and other benefits, access to childcare and education, particularly for Roma, the overall impression is piecemeal, lacking an integrated vision and strategy. Employment is still proposed as the main solution, focusing on ‘reducing disincentives to work’ by increasing conditionality and sanctions rather than focusing on quality job creation, and supportive personalized approaches, which also ensure access to quality social protection and services.

Our Key Messages are the need to reshape the CSRs at the heart of the Semester:

- 1) Rebalance the Semester and put Europe 2020 vision of inclusive, sustainable as well as smart growth and the targets at the heart.**
- 2) Move from austerity to social investment, backing adequate minimum income and quality social protection and services financed through inclusive taxation.**
- 3) Give CSRs consistently on poverty to all Member States and require integrated anti-poverty strategies, supported by at least 20% European Social Fund.**
- 4) Invest in quality job creation, supporting positive activation within active inclusion.**

2) Guidelines must deliver on Europe 2020 with ambitious Guideline 8 on Poverty

The Guideline proposals further confirm our fears, as they are ‘redesigned’ to bring the ‘Semester in line with President Juncker’s Political Guidelines, erasing their explicit role as the key instrument to underpin Europe 2020, its goals and targets. This increases the focus on ‘growth and jobs’, investment, fiscal consolidation and restructuring without integrating commitment to inclusive growth, and delivery on the poverty, employment, education and environmental targets. We strongly welcome the SPC proposals and would further add the following messages.

EAPN’s Key Messages

1) Mainstreaming Europe 2020

Reinstating references to Europe 2020 is crucial, if the Mid-Term Review is to ensure that inclusive growth and the targets are to be re-incorporated into the Semester.

- 2) Beyond ‘fairness’ - support an ambitious Guideline 8 on combatting poverty and social exclusion for all.** Given the crisis on poverty in the EU, a multidimensional approach to poverty and social exclusion must be explicitly mentioned, beyond an ambiguous ‘fairness’ approach, promoting preventative, integrated strategies rooted in holistic Active Inclusion (adequate income support, accessible quality services and inclusive labour markets).

3) Back pathway, integrated pathways to quality jobs and inclusive labour markets


The guidelines need to give more emphasis to investment in sustainable, quality job creation as well as inclusive labour markets. EAPN denounces current trends of compulsive, punitive activation as well as increased precariousness and segmentation, downward pressure on wages, working conditions and rights. Supporting people through holistic, pathway approaches, into quality sustainable jobs is the priority.

4) Ensure meaningful stakeholder participation, including civil society organizations.

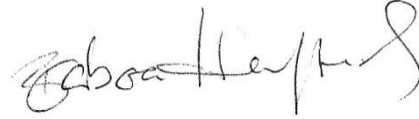
Ownership is crucial for effective delivery. But stakeholders including organized civil society must be involved in a regular dialogue at all stages of the policy process, not just in the implementation i.e. design, implementation and monitoring. **(Recital 6)**

We hope that you will take our messages on board, and would welcome any opportunity to follow up this input with a direct exchange with you regarding their concerns.

Yours sincerely,



Sérgio Aires
EAPN President



Barbara Helfferich
EAPN Director

Cc: Commissioner Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion; Thomas Händel MEP, Chair of the Employment Committee, European Parliament.

See also:

- [EAPN Assessment of 2015 CSRs](#) and [Detailed Country Annex](#)
- [EAPN Proposals on the Commission Integrated Guidelines](#) and proposals for amendments on [economic including recitals](#) and [employment](#) guidelines
- [Letter to Employment Committee on Employment Guidelines](#)