

TOOLKIT ON ENGAGING IN THE NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMMES AND NATIONAL SOCIAL REPORTS 2013

*For anti-poverty networks and organisations
to engage with the 2013 preparation of the
National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and the
Questionnaires on the National Social Reports (NSRs).
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.*

Introduction

This Toolkit is designed to help EAPN National Networks and European Organisations to engage with the 2013 preparation of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and the Questionnaires on the National Social Reports (NSRs). 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](#) at the end. The links in this document lead to the Members' Room or [EAPN's website](#) or to external sources. For any other query, please contact the [Secretariat](#).

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Key information – NRPs and NSRs

National Reform Programmes (NRPs)

National Reform Programmes are yearly reports prepared by the Member States, demonstrating how they are implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy (past and future actions). They describe their implementation of 5 [overarching EU targets](#) to be reached by 2020, translated into national targets by each Member State. Key for EAPN are the poverty target – to achieve a reduction in poverty and social exclusion of at least 20 million people, implemented through 3 indicators (at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation, and low work intensity), the target to reach 75% employment rate, and the one aimed at reducing school drop out to below 10% and improving completion rate for tertiary education. The achievement of these targets should be based on [10 Common Integrated Guidelines](#) (see Annex on page 49). The most important Guideline for EAPN is Guideline 10 - *Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty*. See more information about the Europe 2020 process in the [Briefing Note](#) prepared by the Secretariat, and its [Annex](#). The National Reform Programme should focus on the key priorities of the [Annual Growth Survey \(2013\)](#) and the Integrated Guidelines, but increasingly the main requirement is to show how the Commission's [Country-Specific Recommendations 2012](#) are being delivered. These CSRs are primarily driven by the EU's economic governance – including the [Fiscal Compact](#), [Euro Plus Pact](#), the [Spring European Council Conclusions](#) and others. 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.

The structure of the NRPs should follow the Guidance Note prepared by the European Commission, and which has been sent to Member States in January 2013. It encourages Governments to report on the Europe 2020 targets, the Euro Plus Pact commitments, and the fiscal tables of the Stability or Convergence Programme. The NRP should focus on:

1. Introduction
2. Macroeconomic Context and scenario
3. Implementation of Country-Specific Recommendations
4. Progress towards national Europe 2020 targets
5. Additional Reform Measures and the use of Structural Funds
6. Institutional issues and stakeholder involvement

The NRP needs to be accompanied by a Reporting Table for the assessment of Country-Specific Recommendations and key macro-Economic structural reforms, and a reporting Table on national Europe 2020 targets and other key commitments.

Regarding the so-called “Troika countries”, Governments are not required to submit an NRP, however, “these Member States are asked to report to the Commission on: 1. Their Europe 2020 targets, state-of-play and any possible updates; 2. Their Euro Plus Pact commitments for the coming year, and 3) the fiscal tables of the Stability / Convergence Programme. Such reporting can take the form of a letter.” The NRPs/letters are due by April the 15th, 2013.

Regarding stakeholder involvement, Section 6 is dedicated to “Institutional issues and stakeholder involvement”, and reads as follows: *The section should explain the institutional process for the approval of the NRP, as well as the involvement of national institutional actors (national parliament, regional/local authorities, social partners/civil society). [...] Member States should notably report on: [...] How social partners and the civil society were involved in the preparation of the NRP and in the implementation of the past guidance and commitments.*

National Social Reports (NSRs)

The Social Protection Committee (SPC) members (representatives from the Social Ministries from the Member States), insisted, in their Opinion of June 2011, on the importance of the strengthening of the [Social Open Method of Coordination](#) (OMC), based on the [Common Objectives](#), and addressing access to rights, resources and services, across 3 pillars: Social Inclusion, Pensions, Health and Long-term Care. National Social Reports (NSRs) are prepared to chart how the Common Objectives are being delivered at national level, and to highlight new trends and concerns. Progress is monitored through [Common Social Indicators](#). These have now been incorporated into the [Social Protection Performance Monitor](#). Then mutual learning is promoted through internal SPC [Peer Reviews](#), and external ones, involving other stakeholders, as well as studies and reports. The [first National Social Reports](#) were prepared in 2012, but only 8 Member States contributed on time. In November 2012, because of the difficulties in delivering the NSRs on time, Social Ministers agreed to shift to bi-annual National Social Reports (NSRs), to underpin the NRPs and feed into their social dimension, as well as to contribute to the SPC's own Annual Report. As the first round of NSRs was prepared in 2012, this year (2013) is a “light” year, and Member States will only be required to answer two Questionnaires prepared by the SPC, to monitor progress in-between reporting. The structure of the National Social Reports is set out in a Guidance Note, which is replaced, in the light years, by the Questionnaires.

The Social Protection Committee, in its meeting on the 5th March, agreed its Guidance Note on Strategic Social Reporting for 2013. A Questionnaire has to be completed **before 30th April 2013**, to report on social protection reform since the National Social Report in 2012. They are explicitly asked not to repeat any information already given as part of the country surveillance on the implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations. This final questionnaire has been substantially revised from the original and reflects more concerns that EAPN has lobbied on.

The questions include:

1. What are the challenges your country faces in the areas of competence of the Social OMC?
 - 1.1 Social Inclusion
 - 1.2 Pensions
 - 1.3 Health
 - 1.4 Long-Term Care
2. What reforms (legislative or other) did you country take or will take in 2013 to address the above-mentioned challenges?
 - 2.1 Social Inclusion
 - 2.2 Pensions
 - 2.3 Health and Long-term Care

In the second question, countries are asked to review the capacity of social protection systems to perform their welfare functions, as well as report on ex-ante social impact assessment and stakeholder engagement.

There are several very useful references to **stakeholder involvement**:

Member States are invited to consult the national stakeholders according to their national practice before submitting their Strategic Social Reporting by April 30th 2013.

Under the 1st question - *Please address aspects related to adequacy, access, sustainability, quality, as well as involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy.*

Under the 2nd question - *Please report whether ex-ante social impact assessment have been done or are planes and whether a consultation process with the social partners and NGO(s) has taken places or is planned.*

Please see the full Guidance Note attached to this Toolkit for a full description of what should be reported under each pillar and how reforms should be assessed.

Indicative Timeline

	National Reform Programmes	National Social Reports
END NOVEMBER 2012	The European Commission issues its Annual Growth Survey, which sets out EU priorities for the coming year.	
JANUARY 2013	The European Commission sends Member States the Guidance Note for the NRPs.	The SPC issues the Questionnaire for the NSRs.
FEBRUARY 2013	The Council formations – SPC/EMCO/EPC, EPSCO, ECOFIN and the European Parliament discuss the Annual Growth Survey	The SPC endorses its 2012 Annual Report.
MARCH 2013	European Spring Council issues Conclusions meant to guide national policies on the basis of the Annual Growth Survey.	
APRIL 2013	Member States submit their National Reform Programmes (15 April)	Member States submit the reply to the Questionnaire (30 April)
MAY 2013	The European Commission assesses the NRPs.	
JUNE 2013	The European Commission provides Country-Specific Recommendations to each Member State. The European Council discusses and endorses them.	
AUTUMN 2013	Member States present their budget draft to their Parliaments.	The SPC releases its 2013 Annual Report.

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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.

Annual Growth Survey

This year’s document retains the same Priority 4 – *Tackle Unemployment and the Social Consequences of the Crisis*, which includes a section on “Promoting social inclusion and tackling poverty”. It mentions additional efforts to promote social inclusion and prevent poverty, the development of Active Inclusion strategies (including adequate income support and broad access to affordable and high-quality services), and the linking of social assistance and activation measures through personalised services and one-stop shops (page 12). In EAPN’s view, what is overwhelmingly missing is an EU integrated strategy to eradicate poverty for all groups. The Secretariat will prepare, with the EU ISG, a response to the AGS in January.

Joint Employment Report

This Annex of the AGS focuses on the national policies meant to reach the employment, education, and poverty-reduction targets of Europe 2020, as presented in the National Reform Programmes. This year, the analysis reveals explicitly that household incomes are declining and poverty and social exclusion are on the rise, and the effect of automatic stabilisers has been weakened over time. The document gives explicit recognition that fiscal consolidation measures implemented since 2010 have contributed to this situation. Some groups have been particularly hit (including children, women, single parent households, the active age population and more specifically youth). Also, the JER highlights the increase in in-work poverty, and how low wages and precarious employment have lead to this. Precarious jobs have not acted as a stepping stone to sustainable employment. Social polarisation is also on the rise. The JER also acknowledges that Active Inclusion strategies are not implemented.

SPC Annual Report

The SPC Annual Report is now the key Social OMC report, driving broader social messages beyond the more narrow focus of Europe 2020 and the Annual Growth Survey. This year it will be endorsed in February 2013 by the EPSCO. We have only seen a draft. It reviews the current situation in Member States, drawing on the base of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (based on the full dashboard of the old Social OMC Indicators), and on this basis agrees Trends to Watch, where priority trends occur in 9 Member States. This year, because of the timing, it will only aim to influence the key messages to the Spring European Council. For this reason, the SPC intends to shift the next SPC Annual Report to October, to have more impact on the Annual Growth Survey. It will also make it easier to use as policy hooks in developing our input.

EPSCO letter to the General Affairs Council

The Employment and Social Affairs Ministers, meeting in Brussels on 10th December 2012, have addressed a letter to the General Affairs Council, in which they underlined their concerns regarding the loss of focus on the social dimension of the Economic Monetary Union. The letter underlines that policies fighting unemployment, policy and social exclusion should be pursued in a balanced policy mix with fiscal and monetary policies. The EPSCO highlights that the role of social protection as automatic stabilizer is not longer recognized by the Annual Growth Survey,

and that pension systems are only presented under financial sustainability, while other issues, such as wages and health care, are only considered from an economic perspective. Ministers underline that their contribution is important, and, as such, say they will introduce the macroeconomic aspect in their debates in 2013. If you wish to consult the original letter, please contact the [Secretariat](#).

Annual Convention of the European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion

In December 2012, on the occasion of the event above, important European leaders made speeches about the poverty and social exclusion situation in Member States. Please find below a summary of the key points of their intervention which can be used in lobbying, as well as an overview of [EAPN's Key Messages to the Annual Convention](#) (click to see full messages).

EAPN Key Messages

- An EU integrated anti-poverty strategy at the heart of the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- Democratic accountability + meaningful dialogue with national stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty.
- A coherent Social Investment Package, focused on public investment in prevention, developed through adequate consultation.

Joao Manuel Durao Barroso, President of the European Commission

Poverty is one of the key challenges of today. Citizens of Europe feel fear and uncertainty on a daily basis. Over one in five Europeans live under the threat of poverty. There are 26 million unemployed. There is a social emergency situation. Growth should be sustainable and inclusive. There are limits to the political and social acceptability of some of the measures being implemented around Europe. This is not a theoretical model, there are people behind. The European Social Model is not dead! It should form an integral part of our economic recovery. An effective social protection system is not an obstacle to prosperity. Poverty and social inclusion are not a niche policy, but has to be at the heart of European policies.

Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council

Being poor is not just about needs, but about human dignity. Fighting poverty is a priority for the EU. We want growth to be inclusive, but we have to admit that we are not on track today. "The strongest shoulders have to carry the heaviest burden". We need growth and jobs to keep our social model alive. "I hope that we will find agreement on a budget to help may poor people". "Our social model is deficient as long as poverty exists, and as long as we are convinced that it is not possible to prevent it".

Laszlo Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Unemployment, poverty and exclusion continue to be on the rise. The income of the average household declined, in 2011, in 2 out of 3 Member States. The crisis has deepened inequality in and between Member States. Social protection is not the easy remedy when things are going badly, but an investment in future prosperity and well being. We must focus on social protection, benefits, and services that improve human capital, fighting exclusion and promoting employment. Active Inclusion strategies, of better quality, more effective and efficient, are vital. Early childhood education and care is crucial.

Sotiroula Charalambos, Cypriot Presidency of the European Union

The Union's prosperity and social cohesion are under threat. The strict austerity measures and cuts have not resolved the problems, but have worsened them. The wealth should be shared more equitably. The chosen approach can't be socialising loses and privatizing profits. Social protection and social services must be regarded as useful economic stabilisers, and their efficiency and effectiveness must be strengthen. We will not be competitive without tackling poverty. The success of Europe 2020 depends on an integrated and coherent approach. Promoting social investment is a social goal in itself.

Social Investment Package

The Communication *Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion*, and the rest of the Social Investment Package, released in February 2013, is DG Employment's main key social inclusion input to Europe 2020. Its main message is that social policy should be seen as a social investment, using budgets more efficiently to get employment, economic and social returns, strengthening people's capacity to enter the labour market and society, through a life cycle approach. However, the good intentions are undermined by predominant messages about efficiency and the need to refocus social budgets towards more activating and enabling budgets and away from 'passive social protection', pressing for more targeting, temporary payments and conditionality. The Package also includes initiatives from the European Platform against Poverty – Child Poverty Recommendation, Active Inclusion Report, Homelessness Report and others – and it features some important positive recommendations, but the lack of coherence with the Social OMC, EPAP and overall key messages of cause great concern, particularly in its impact on Europe 2020, the European Semester and the CSRs. The [Secretariat](#) has prepared a [full briefing](#) on the Package, to be followed by a response.

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General Tips for Engaging at the National Level

1. Identify who is drafting the NRPs / the Questionnaires for the NSRs in your country

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... See [here](#) an interactive map, indicating NRP contacts by country (click on your country, then right-hand side). Regarding the Questionnaires for the National Social Reports, they should be answered by the Social Affairs Ministries, as with the previous National Strategic Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. In order to be sure, the easiest way is to get in touch with your SPC member - download here the [list of contacts](#) (it is updated every summer). Find all relevant information in the [Who to Contact?](#) section below (click for quick access).

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

Write or e-mail the relevant contacts and ask what process will be developed to involve stakeholders in the NRP and NSR Questionnaire 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.

Please remember that contacting your SPC member, to find out more details about the process, is crucial, and also that the Independent Experts on Social Protection and Social Inclusion can be a key partner in this process. You might 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 – e.g. 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).

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 in the work. Some members strive to include the direct participation of people experiencing poverty. 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 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 can choose between a range of options for engagement - details are provided in the [next section](#). You should clarify the key weaknesses of your country's draft NRP / Questionnaire for National Social Report against your list of what you consider key requirements. In preparing your position, look at your country's last year's [National Reform Programme and Country Specific Recommendations](#), and the [National Social Report](#). You can also refer to the joint EAPN review of the NRPs for [2011](#) and [2012](#), as well as members' [shadow Country Specific Recommendations](#). Other helpful documents are [EAPN's response to the Annual Growth Survey](#) and [EAPN's Response to the Joint Employment Report](#) for 2012. You can also consult European Organisations' assessments of the 2012 National Reform Programmes: [FEANTSA](#), [Eurochild](#) (including National Social Reports), [Caritas](#). This may help you devise your key messages – although, in the end, each national context will be different.

Given the short timeframe, you might not be provided with a document you can comment on, but only have the opportunity to provide written or oral input without seeing a draft text. Be prepared to send your 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. See the examples from members for inspiration. If you are sent the draft, you will often have a very short time to respond. Having prepared your key messages before will help you to be able to provide input within the tight deadlines.

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

5. Build alliances

Last year's 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. A key resource and ally can be the [Independent Experts on Social Protection and Social Inclusion](#), who will be responsible for revising the NRPs and NSRs for the Commission each year, and maybe involved in contributing proposals to the Country-specific Recommendations. It's important to send your inputs/messages and proposals of Recommendations to 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.

6. 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 circulating them through different channels and groups. If possible, it is always useful to involve media (including social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, blogs, forums) to convey your messages more widely to the general public and raise awareness on the process and concerns.

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Suggestions for Alternative Inputs and Good Practices

Members of the EU Inclusion Strategies Group have identified different ways of engaging in a more pro-active way with National Reform Programmes and Questionnaires for the National Social Reports, and more broadly with anti-poverty policy. These include preparing alternative reports **before** these are being drafted, providing a basis to feed into the drafting process and to raise public awareness, using the Country-Specific Recommendations to more effect, and ideas for stronger forums or platforms to provide a basis for the dialogue process and other inputs.

Main proposals in this direction are summarised below. See also the proposed EAPN Advocacy Strategy for 2013, agreed in the last meeting, for how the EU ISG will engage with Europe 2020 and connected processes in 2013. For more information and support about a specific action, please contact the [Secretariat](#).

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

Some National Networks have suggested preparing an alternative, preventative report of the social situation for their country, highlighting the main issues on the ground in their national context and proposing policy solutions. These would be more pro-active inputs, and would constitute also the basis for feeding into the National Reform Programmes, the Questionnaires or National Social Reports, and the Country-Specific Recommendations. This proposed work will constitute a trial only in 2013, and National Networks are invited to join on a voluntary basis. The pro-active / preventive reports would follow an agreed common structure, answering a series of headings, touching upon poverty and social exclusion, social protection, services, inclusive labour markets, equal opportunities and redistribution, dialogue and participation, and proposing recommendations for each of the headings. A core team, led by Vito Telesca (EAPN IT) and comprising Jeanne Dietrich (EAPN FR), Elke Vandermeerschen (EAPN BE), Carola Schmidt (DE) and the members of the EU ISG Steering Group (Paul Ginnell – EAPN IE, Sonja Leemkuil – EAPN NL, Sebastian Nastuta – EAPN RO, Liz Gosme – FEANTSA), with support from the Secretariat, have prepared a template, which has been sent to members separately, together with the methodology, timeline, and other aspects. Some EAPN networks – BE, IT, PT – have already prepared such reports for 2013.

EAPN Germany produced, in 2012, their own shadow report, on both wealth and poverty. This was timed to coincide with the release of the German Poverty and Wealth Report. The Network printed 20.000 copies, out of which 5.000 were sold on the street in a magazine/street paper format, in cooperation with Street Papers organisation, for the modest price of 1.50 euro each. The rest of the reports have been sent to key contacts and decision-makers, as well as to all EAPN DE member organisations. The report was well taken up by the media as well, with 700 articles dedicated to the phenomenon, 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 [Carola Schmidt](#).

2. Shadow NRP or NSR / Other alternative reports

Some members have developed alternative reports that more closely follow the structure of the NRP or NSR. These have the advantage of presenting the information in a more targeted way, so that they may have more chance of being picked up by the drafters of the NRP and NSR. The disadvantage is that it may not allow you to make your points in the most powerful way, and can be more difficult to use to raise awareness to the public. A key requirement is that these shadow reports/inputs should be annexed to the NRP or NSR, as happened with the French NRP in 2011.

EAPN France has contributed to the Opinion of the National Council for the Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion. The opinion follows the structure of the NRP. The improvement is that this Opinion has been attached in its entirety to the National Reform Programme. The NRP has been sent by the General Secretariat for European Affairs to the European Commission. Thus, all our demands clearly appear in this Opinion. It remains to be seen what will be taken into account from this annex, but we can still consider it a step forward. For more information contact [Jeanne Dietrich](#).

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](#).

3. Shadow Country Specific Recommendations

In 2011, EAPN National Networks developed their own [Country-Specific Recommendations](#) (CSRs), based on our joint in-depth analysis of the NRPs and NSRs in the May EU ISG meeting. The Commission and European Parliament gave a positive response to the inputs, and the complete list was circulated widely in the Commission and Parliament and amongst stakeholders. In the case of Spain, the Commission's Country-Specific Recommendation was changed as a result. However, the timing was very difficult, as the Commission have completed their draft CSRs by May, when many members had only just accessed their NRPs. So this year, the EU ISG meeting in November agreed to be more pro-active. It was agreed to:

- Compare the CSRs prepared by your Network for your country in 2012 to those issued by the European Commission, commenting on how far the proposals are the same, and highlighting gaps;
- Comment briefly on implementation of the CSRs – negative and positive points;
- Propose new Country-Specific Recommendations;

This work is prepared with the support for the Secretariat, and has already begun through a dedicated day at the EU ISG meeting in February 2013. The resulting proposals will be fed directly into the NRPs/Questionnaires in each country.

EAPN Bulgaria analysed the Country-Specific Recommendations issued by the European Commission, and compared the ones for Bulgaria with other countries. They showed, that, for

instance, in the CSRs for Austria there was positive rhetoric on taxation, but in Bulgaria's case, nothing was said about the flat rate. The lesson learned is that the CSRs are very tangible and easy to work on, and that comparisons with other countries are also useful. For more information, contact [Douhomir Minev](#).

4. Developing National Platforms Against Poverty

Some Networks have focussed on building a strong dialogue forum with their Governments, which can become the basis for inputs to Europe 2020, but also other national poverty policies and measures. A key challenge is to try to ensure these have a regular, and meaningful structured dialogue, and to try to engage people experiencing poverty in the process.

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. Aside from staff and people from member organisations, the group includes some 20 people experiencing poverty. The group engages in capacity-building and builds credibility through speaking with a single voice. 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. It is a good process, but with some shortcomings: the NRP is the competency of the Prime Minister's office, and no representative attends the meetings, so the input is not so much taken up in the NRPs. For more information, contact [Elke Vandermeerschen](#), and see full PowerPoint presentation [here](#).

5. Awareness raising on poverty and Europe 2020

Some Networks have tried to focus more on awareness-raising, to get public debate and draw together broader dialogue platforms. These have the goal of influencing longer-term Government priorities.

EAPN Denmark has started engaging as early as 2006, through awareness-raising projects on the National Action Plans, and conferences on poverty in Denmark. It developed a network of interested parties, including NGOs, civil servants, politicians from both sides of the spectrum. 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. There is a hearing process, including meetings, providing opportunities for input. Proposals have no effect immediately, but might have some impact on upcoming plans and reports. The Network proposed to the Government to support a stronger OMC, including shadow reports, awareness programmes, local and national activities. For more information, contact [Per K. Larssen](#), and see full PowerPoint presentation [here](#).

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Next Steps: Checklist and Timeline for EAPN Action

Timeline	Action	Check ✓
December 2012 – 20 January 2013	Preparation of pro-active inputs – eg Alternative Social Situation Report (optional), or shadow NSR or NRP, or other inputs.	
December 2012 – January 2013	Contact your SPC member to find out more information about the process and who the principal contact points are.	
First half of February 2013, (EU ISG meeting)	Working together on Country Specific Recommendations: analysis, comparison, new ones prepared.	
Second half of February 2013	Send your input or Alternative Report to your Government, your SPC member and your Independent Social Inclusion Expert, as well as other national partners (NGOs, trade unions etc), together with your shadow Country Specific Recommendations.	
Second half of February, March, first half of April 2013	Continue to press for a stakeholder process on the NRP and NSR Questionnaire, and for your engagement with your Government, including sending any responses to drafts; use media and other channels to put forward your proposals.	
End of April 2013	Get hold of your NRP and NSR Questionnaire and review them together with your Network or Organisation, checking them against your inputs; issue a Press Release, and send your comments to the Government and European Commission.	
May – June 2013	Shared analysis, with the EU ISG (meeting May 10th and 11th), of the NRPs and NSR Questionnaires, as well as on Country Specific Recommendations. Questionnaire and Synthesis Report Format to be agreed in the next meeting.	
July – September 2013	Disseminate the EAPN synthesis report and your own inputs/reactions to your Government, the SPC representative, the Independent Expert, the media, and other stakeholders.	
September – December 2013	Press for stakeholder dialogue on the Country Specific Recommendations and follow up.	
September 2013	Review your engagement and consider next steps – including more pro-active inputs.	
October 2013	Feedback your evaluation and proposals for action.	

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Who to Contact?

Europe 2020 Specific Information

On the link below, click the name of your country on the interactive map. You can access all relevant information, including the previous National Reform Programmes, the Country Specific Recommendations, Macroeconomic Indicators, National targets for Europe 2020, as well as the **national contact point** in charge of Europe 2020 in your country (on your right hand side):
http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-your-country/index_en.htm

Members of the Social Protection Committee

[Click](#) to download list of contacts. These are your best first point of entry. You should be trying to develop an on-going relationship with them.

List of Independent Experts on Social Protection and Social Inclusion

[Click](#) to download list of contacts. There are very useful allies.

For more information, please contact the EAPN Secretariat

Sian Jones, Policy Coordinator: sian.jones@eapn.eu / 0032 2 226 58 59

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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

In the Integrated Guidelines underpinning the Europe 2020 Strategy (Recital 16) specific support is given to the partnership principle involving stakeholders at all stages of the NRPs:

When designing and implementing their National Reform Programmes taking account of these guidelines, Member States should ensure effective governance of employment policy. While these guidelines are addressed to Member States, the Europe 2020 strategy should, as appropriate, be implemented, monitored and evaluated in partnership with all national, regional and local authorities, closely associating parliaments, as well as social partners and representatives of civil society, who shall contribute to the elaboration of National Reform Programmes, to their implementation and to the overall communication on the strategy.

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

The Annual Growth Survey for 2011 specifically mentioned, in its Annex 1 – Progress Report on Europe 2020:

In parallel national consultations should be finalised in order to secure strong ownership of the NRPs. These consultations should involve political actors (national parliaments, regional and local authorities) as well as social partners and other stakeholders in the preparations. Only a limited number of cases have the draft NRPs already been the subject of consultation at different levels. While some Member States indicated that they would engage in consultations before finalising their NRPs, most have not provided information on the consultation process.

The same document reminds the common structure that all NRPs should have, including information on the involvement and contributions of the different stakeholders.

Unfortunately, there are no mentions of stakeholder engagement in the Annual Growth Survey for **2012**, neither in any of its Annexes (such as the Progress Report on Europe 2020 or the draft Joint Employment Report).

In the Annual Growth Survey for **2013**, the following rather ambiguous reference can be found:

The Commission will work closely with national authorities, including national parliaments, EU Institutions and other stakeholders to create a shared sense of ownership and steer progress as part of wider EU efforts to exit from the crisis and to lay the foundations for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth across the EU.

Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion

At the occasion of this three-day high-level conference, held in December 2013 in Brussels, key European leaders made useful statements to support stakeholder involvement in the Europe 2020 process. Find the most important quotes below:

Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, President of the European Commission

This annual convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion is unique in its kind bringing together all actors in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The convention is thus the expression of the fact that poverty and exclusion can only be addressed in a very close partnership between all those involved and concerned. Because I also believe that only an inclusive and participatory approach will help us in defining the right policies for now and the future.

Laszlo Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

The Platform against Poverty could be developed further into a venue for stakeholder involvement in meeting the Europe 2020 targets, sharing ownership and securing collective commitment. Stakeholders such as regions and cities, social partners, civil society and where possible those directly affected by our policies must have a say in designing, implementing and monitoring national reform programmes.

Sotiroula Charalambos, Cyprus Presidency of the European Union

We strongly believe that the success of the 'Europe 2020' Strategy depends on the active involvement of all sections of society. This is why a key priority of the Cyprus Presidency is the strengthening of the participatory processes and the involvement of NGOs, local authorities and the social partners in the implementation of the 'Europe 2020 Strategy', especially as regards the employment and poverty targets. Civil society must work in partnership with governments in order to conceptualize and implement successful reforms that deal effectively with the social consequences of the crisis.

Social Investment Package

This comprehensive package, released by the European Commission on February the 20th, is comprised of a main communication and 8 additional documents. You can see all documents and more details [here](#). The below summarises references to stakeholder involvement in the NRPs.

⇒ **Communication: Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion**

Member States are urged to strengthen the involvement of relevant stakeholders at all levels, most notably social partners and civil society organisations, in the modernisation of social policy as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

⇒ **Communication: Investing in children – breaking the cycle of disadvantage**

Promote close cooperation and regular dialogue between public authorities at all levels, social partners, local communities and civil society organisations (for the delivery of child poverty policies in general)

⇒ **Staff Working Document: Follow-up of the Implementation of the Active Inclusion Recommendation (2008)**

The document recalls that the original Active Inclusion Recommendation of the European Commission (2008) called for *active participation of civil society organisations in the development, implementation and evaluation strategies.*

Participation of relevant stakeholders should be built into the design and evaluation of national active inclusion strategies in line with the 2008 recommendation on active inclusion. (Note: these strategies should be part of the NRP).

It is required that the national active inclusion strategy is in accordance with the poverty and social exclusion target of the country concerned, involves the relevant stakeholders and provides a sufficient evidence base to monitor developments.

Engage relevant actors more vigorously in the development, implementation, and assessment of policies. Active inclusion is a joint responsibility in European societies. Efforts to engage the relevant actors need a boost. The actors include those affected by poverty and social exclusion, civil society organisations, nongovernmental organisations, local administrations and the private sector. They should get involved in designing strategies that help those furthest from the labour market to get jobs, thus bringing valuable human capital to national economies.

EAPN's analysis of stakeholder involvement in the NRPs, from the NRP report of 2011, is extensively referenced and quoted in the document (page 46).

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Glossary: Jargon Buster

Annual Growth Survey

The Annual Growth Survey is the main tool for EU-level economic policy coordination, and it ensures that Member States align their budgetary and economic policies with the Stability and Growth Pact and the Europe 2020 Strategy. It is the basis for building a common understanding about the priorities for action at the national and EU level, and should feed into national economic and budgetary decisions, which Member States will set out in Stability and Convergence Programmes (under the Stability and Growth Pact) and National Reform Programmes (under the Europe 2020 strategy) in April. These programmes will form the basis for the European Commission's proposals for Country-Specific Recommendations in May.

Annual SPC Report

The Annual Report of the Social Protection Committee (SPC) reviews the current trends, on the basis of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (see below), and key developments related to the delivery on the Common Objectives of the Social OMC (see below), with particular reference to pillars 2 and 3 (pensions, health and long-term care), which are not well covered in the National Reform Programme. It replaces the old OMC Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, but it is now only produced by the SPC, without the European Commission. Where 9 Member States share the same key trends, they will be highlighted as new key priorities (called *Trends to Watch*).

Common Objectives of the OMC

In the context of the Open Method of Coordination applied to Social Protection and Social Inclusion (see below), Member States have agreed on common objectives. Member States translated these common objectives into national policies through National Action Plans (2008-2010). They are free to choose how they appropriately achieve the common objectives. See more information [here](#).

Common Social Indicators

Progress of anti-poverty measures in different EU countries is monitored and evaluated through the use of common European indicators which allow for comparability of national data and trends. The broad methodological framework consists of a list of primary and secondary indicators for an overarching portfolio and the three strands (Social Inclusion, Pension, Health and Long-Term Care). See more information [here](#).

Country-Specific Recommendations

These are documents prepared by the European Commission for each Member State, analysing its economic situation and providing recommendations on measures it should adopt over the coming 12 months. They are tailored to the particular issues the Member State is facing and cover a broad range of topics: the state of public finances, reforms of pension systems, measures to create jobs and to fight unemployment and poverty, education and innovation challenges, etc.

EPSCO

The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) is composed of employment, social protection, consumer protection, health and equal opportunities ministers, who meet around four times a year. Please see more information [here](#).

Euro Plus Pact

The Euro Plus Pact is a 2011 plan in which some Member States of the European Union make concrete commitments to a list of political reforms which are intended to improve the fiscal strength and competitiveness of each country. The Euro-Plus Pact has four broad strategic goals: fostering competitiveness; fostering employment; contributing to the sustainability of public finances; reinforcing financial stability; tax policy coordination.

Europe 2020 Strategy

Europe 2020 is the European Union's ten-year strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It relies on five key targets for the EU to achieve by the end of the decade. These cover employment; education; research and innovation; social inclusion and poverty reduction; and climate/energy. The Strategy also includes seven "Flagship Initiatives", providing a framework through which the EU and national authorities mutually reinforce their efforts in areas supporting the Europe 2020 priorities. For more information, see [here](#).

European Platform against Poverty

The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion (EPAP) is one of the seven Flagship Initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy (see above), which sets out actions to reach the EU target of reducing poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million people by 2020. Key actions: improved access to work, social security, essential services (healthcare, housing, etc.) and education; better use of EU funds to support social inclusion and combat discrimination; social innovation to find smart solutions in post-crisis Europe, especially in terms of more effective and efficient social support; new partnerships between the public and the private sector. For more information, see [here](#).

Fiscal Compact

The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union is an intergovernmental treaty introduced as a new, stricter version of the previous Stability and Growth Pact. It was signed on 2 March 2012 by all Member States of the European Union, except the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom. Ratifying member states are required to have enacted laws requiring their national budgets to be in balance or in surplus within the treaty's definition. These laws must also provide for a self-correcting mechanism to prevent their breach. For more information, please see [here](#).

Independent Social Inclusion Experts

A Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion assists the European Commission in monitoring and evaluating the situation with regard to poverty and social exclusion and the policies that are relevant in this respect in the Member States and Accession countries (Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Iceland). Each year, experts provide two reports on their respective countries with regard to a specific subject that is being examined in the context of the EU social inclusion process, and an independent (non-governmental) assessment of an official policy document (the social inclusion strand of the

National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion or an official reply to a Social Protection Committee questionnaire on a specific topic). The Network Core Team produces synthesis reports, bringing together the main results of the analysis across countries.

Integrated Guidelines

These are a set of 10 guidelines, developed by the European Commission, aimed at helping Member States to implement the 5 overarching targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy (see above). While the first 6 are macro-economic guidelines, the final 4 (numbers 7 through 10) are the so-called “employment guidelines”, and deal with the employment, education, and poverty-reduction targets of Europe 2020. The Guidelines are supposed to provide a basis for the NRPs.

National Reform Programmes (NRPs)

These are annual plans submitted by the Governments of the 27 Member States in April of each year, for the duration of the Europe 2020 Strategy (2010-2020). They are meant to show how Member States are implementing the overarching targets of Europe 2020 (translated by each into national targets), while taking into account the Integrated Guidelines (see above).

National Social Reports (NSRs)

These represent the annual reporting of Member States on their strategies and progress achieved towards the Common Objectives for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, and support the assessment of the social dimension of Europe 2020. The input should cover policies and measures in the three strands of the Social OMC and ensure synergies with the Europe 2020 policy cycle and national reporting requirements. These national reports feed into the SPC Annual Report, which includes the annual assessment of the social dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy to input into the Annual Growth Survey and EU policy guidance, as well as input into the assessment of progress achieved by Member States in the context of the 2012 European Semester, including as part of the multilateral surveillance.

National Social Reports - Questionnaire

The NSRs are likely to be submitted every other year. In the year in between, the Social Protection Committee will address Member States a Questionnaire, meant to monitor progress in between formal reporting. 2013 is the first year when the Questionnaires will be used.

Poverty (Reduction) Target in the Europe 2020 Strategy

The poverty-reduction target is one of the 5 overarching objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy (see above). It aims at lifting, by 2020, at least 20 million people in the EU out of poverty and social exclusion. Progress is measured according to three key indicators, explained below:

- **At risk of poverty**

One of the three indicators underpinning the poverty-reduction target of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The at-risk-of-poverty rate is the share of people with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfer) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers. See more [here](#).

- **Severe material deprivation**

One of the three indicators underpinning the poverty-reduction target of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Material deprivation refers to a state of economic strain and durables strain, defined as the enforced inability (rather than the *choice* not to do so) to pay unexpected expenses,

afford a one-week annual holiday away from home, a meal involving meat, chicken or fish every second day, the adequate heating of a dwelling, durable goods like a washing machine, colour television, telephone or car, being confronted with payment arrears (mortgage or rent, utility bills, hire purchase instalments or other loan payments). For more information, see [here](#).

- **Low work intensity**

One of the three indicators underpinning the poverty-reduction target of the Europe 2020 Strategy. People living in households with very low work intensity are people aged 0-59 living in households where the adults work less than 20% of their total work potential during the past year. For more information, please see [here](#).

Social Investment Package

The Social Investment Package is a comprehensive set of documents, released by the European Commission on February 20th, 2013. It builds upon the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and complements other recent Commission initiatives to address Europe's social and economic challenges, namely the [Employment Package](#), [Youth Employment Package](#) and the [White Paper on Pensions](#). It is an integrated policy framework, focussing on: Ensuring that social protection systems respond to people's needs at critical moments throughout their lives; simplified and better targeted social policies, to provide adequate and sustainable social protection systems; upgrading active inclusion strategies in the Member States. The Package consists of a Communication setting out the policy framework, concrete actions to be taken by Member States and the Commission and guidance on the use of EU funds to support reforms. It is accompanied by:

- ⇒ A Commission Recommendation on 'Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' containing an integrated policy framework to improve children's opportunities;
- ⇒ A Staff Working Document (SWD) containing evidence on demographic and social trends and the role of social policies in responding to the social, economic and macro-economic challenges;
- ⇒ A Staff Working Document following up on the 2008 Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion for people excluded from the labour market;
- ⇒ The 3rd Biennial Report on Social Services of General Interest to help public authorities and stakeholders understand and implement the revised EU rules on social services;
- ⇒ A Staff Working Document on Long Term Care, presenting challenges and policy options;
- ⇒ A Staff Working Document on confronting homelessness, explaining the situation of homelessness in the European Union and possible strategies to consider;
- ⇒ A Staff Working Document on Investing in Health, containing strategies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of health systems in a context of tighter public healthcare budgets and discussing how health can contribute to increasing human capital and social inclusion;
- ⇒ A Staff Working Document outlining how the European Social Fund will contribute to implementing the Social Investment Package.

The Secretariat has prepared a [briefing](#) for EAPN members about the Package's contents.

Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC)

For policy areas where the European Union cannot adopt European legislation (i.e. areas which remain the responsibility of national governments), there are soft law methods which are used to promote cooperation between EU countries. The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is one of these soft law methods. The OMC provides a new framework for cooperation between the Member States, whose national policies can thus be directed towards certain common objectives. Under this intergovernmental method, the Member States are evaluated by one another (peer pressure), with the Commission's role being limited to monitoring and facilitating. Member States since 2000 co-ordinate their policies for combating poverty and social exclusion through the Social OMC. See more information [here](#).

Social Protection Committee (SPC)

The Social Protection Committee was established in 2000 in order to serve as a vehicle for cooperative exchange between the European Commission and the Member States of the EU about modernising and improving social protection systems. The Committee consists of two representatives appointed by each Member State and two representatives of the Commission. The national delegates of the SPC provide a voice for national Governments in the framework of the EU strategy for social inclusion and social protection, and monitor closely the initiatives launched in this process. See more information [here](#).

Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM)

This important new instrument, developed through the Social OMC and the Indicators Sub-Group of the SPC, aims to reinforce coordination of social policy and multilateral surveillance. The SPPM will strengthen the monitoring of the social situation in Europe by the SPC (art. 160 TFEU), identifying the main common social trends and reinforcing the multilateral surveillance capacity of the SPC, enhancing the Committee's role in the European Semester, and helping the EPSCO have a stronger and more powerful voice in defending social issues in the European Council. It will make full use of the EU portfolio of indicators on social protection and social inclusion, which will be the main source for the indicators.

Spring European Council

Meeting of the European Council (comprising the 27 Heads of State or Government of the 27 Member States of the European Union) which usually takes place in March of each year. Among other issues, it issues conclusions meant to provide guidance to Member States for their economic, financial, and social policy, to be reflected in the National Reform Programmes.

Troika countries

Also called "Programme countries", these are Member States of the European Union who have received bail-out funds managed by the "Troika" – the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. The arrangements are governed, in each country, by a Memorandum of Understanding, setting out the conditions of repayment. These often entail very harsh austerity measures. Troika countries are: Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Romania.

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