

TOOLKIT ON ENGAGING with EUROPE 2020 and the EUROPEAN SEMESTER

COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS, NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMMES AND NATIONAL SOCIAL REPORTS 2014

For anti-poverty networks and organisations to engage with the Europe 2020 Strategy and the 2014 European Semester, through the National Reform Programmes (NRPs), the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs), and 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 during 2014 with the European Semester delivering on Europe 2020, and in particular with Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs), and the preparation of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and the National Social Reports (NSRs). It supports the delivery of EAPN's Europe 2020 advocacy strategy, and it aims at providing you with brief, to-the-point information about the processes and the opportunities for engagement, by clarifying the key elements, timeline, and strategic actors of the new process, as well as giving links and suggesting different ways of involvement. We also give some tips for engaging in the new round, building on members' experiences from the past years, and previous such Toolkits drafted with members. If any of the terms used in this Toolkit are not clear, please refer to the [Glossary](#) on the EAPN website. For any other query, please contact the [Secretariat](#).

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What is Europe 2020? What is the European Semester?

[Europe 2020](#) is a 10-year strategy, proposed by the European Commission on 3 March 2010, aimed at "smart, sustainable, inclusive growth". It takes over from the Lisbon Strategy (which covered the period 2000–2010). The Strategy identifies [five headline targets](#):

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

Monitoring progress and ensuring the active involvement of Member States are key elements of the Strategy. This is done through the [European Semester](#), an annual cycle of macro-economic, budgetary and structural policy coordination. This is done through 3 (supposedly reinforcing) pillars: *thematic* coordination (in areas like employment, social inclusion, education), *macroeconomic* surveillance and *fiscal* surveillance under the Stability and Growth Pact. The Semester is supported by [7 EU Flagship Initiatives](#), aimed at catalysing progress under each theme. The key stages in the European semester are as follows:

- **In January**, the Commission issues its [Annual Growth Survey](#), which sets out EU priorities for the coming year to boost growth and job creation.
- **In February**, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament discuss the Annual Growth Survey.
- **In March**, EU Heads of State and Government (i.e. the European Council) issue EU guidance for national policies on the basis of the Annual Growth Survey.
- **In April**, Member States submit their Stability and Convergence Programmes (SCP) for 'sound public finances' as well as National Reform Programmes (NRP) which detail how targets will be reached, what national policies will be implemented, and how the EU guidance has been taken into account (see below for more).
- **In May**, the Commission assesses these Programmes.
- **In June**, the Commission provides [Country-Specific Recommendations](#), as appropriate, to each Member State. The European Council discusses and endorses the recommendations.
- **In July**, the Council of the European Union formally adopts the Country-Specific Recommendations.
- **In Autumn**, the Governments present the budget draft to their Parliaments.

- **In November**, the Commissions AGS assesses progress in the implementation of the CSRs and on the priorities set.
- Where recommendations are not acted on within the given time-frame, policy warnings can be issued. There is also an option for enforcement through incentives and sanctions in the case of excessive macroeconomic and budgetary imbalances.

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Key tools – NRPs, CSRs, and NSRs

National Reform Programmes (NRPs)

National Reform Programmes are the yearly reports within the European Semester, prepared by the Member States, demonstrating how they are implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy (past and future actions), and the priorities of the Annual Growth Survey. They are presented together with the Stability and Convergence Programmes (SCP) which detail progress on fiscal stability. They should describe their implementation of 5 [overarching EU targets](#) to be reached by 2020 (see above), translated into national targets by each Member State. Key for EAPN are the poverty target – to achieve a reduction in poverty and social exclusion of at least 20 million people, implemented through 3 indicators (at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation, and low work intensity), the target to reach 75% employment rate, and the one aimed at reducing school drop out to below 10% and improving completion rate for tertiary education. 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 \(2014\)](#) and the Integrated Guidelines, but increasingly the main requirement is to show how the Commission's [Country-Specific Recommendations 2013](#) are being delivered, and to respond to the Commission's assessment of the implementation of the CSRs (annex of the AGS). These CSRs are primarily driven by the EU's economic governance – including the [Fiscal Compact](#), [Euro Plus Pact](#), the Spring European Council Conclusions (2014, upcoming) and others. For the so-called "Troika Countries", Governments were not required to submit an NRP in 2013, but to continue to fulfil the requirements of their respective Memoranda of Understanding, and send only an update letter to the European Commission, outlining progress on the five overarching targets of Europe 2020. Measures described in the NRPs should be correlated to the national targets, and should be concrete, reflect urgency and detail budgetary consequences. Each year's NRP should build on the previous, and give emphasis to implementation of the CSRs. A new element in the National Semester process from 2013 is the requirement within the Euro area for Member States to present their national budgets for surveillance on the 15 October, to see how far they have implemented the CSRs, specifically in the macroeconomic field.

The structure of the NRP is set out in a [Guidance Note](#), released by the European Commission in October 2013. The document clarifies that the NRPs should strike the right balance between reporting on progress made and setting out new policy proposals. Member States receiving EU / IMF financial assistance are not required to submit an NRP, but are explicitly asked to report on the state of play of Europe 2020 targets, alongside commitments under the Stability or

Convergence Programme, in a separate letter. The Guidance Note details the structure of the NRP, and provides useful table to monitor the implementation of country-specific recommendations. The structure of the NRP should be as follows:

1. Introduction (1-2 pages)
2. Macroeconomic context and scenario (2-3 pages)
3. Implementation of Country-Specific Recommendations (1-2 page for each recommendation)
4. Progress towards national Europe 2020 targets (5 pages)
5. Additional reform measures and the use of Structural Funds (as necessary)
6. Institutional issues and stakeholder involvement (2 pages).

The Guidance Note also contains a very useful [Annex](#), which details, step by step, the timeline of the European Semester (as reprised, in a simplified version, below in this Toolkit).

Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)

The [Country Specific Recommendations](#) are the recommendations made by the Commission for each country within the European Semester, based on a review of each Member State's economic and social performance in the previous year, and on how far they are delivering on the EU-wide priorities set out in the Annual Growth Survey. The recommendations are concrete, targeted and measurable, and concentrate on what can realistically be achieved in the next 12-18 months. As countries face different challenges, the recommendations tailor the AGS priorities to the situation in each Member State. The “Troika” countries do not receive recommendations, because they have concrete requirements agreed in their programme arrangements. The CSRs cover a broad range of issues, but focus on structural reforms, although since 2011 there has been a gradual increase of social CSRs. They are drafted by the European Commission, after a thorough assessment of progress since the previous year's CSRs, and a detailed analysis of the National Reform Programmes and Stability or Convergence Programmes, submitted by Member States in April.

The CSRs are debated in the Council formations (eg EPC, EMCO and SPC), before being discussed and endorsed by Heads of State or Government at the European Council in June. Last year, the Social Protection Committee managed changes to some CSRs. The final adoption of the CSRs in July concludes the European Semester. Implementation of the CSRs is monitored closely and on an ongoing basis by the European Commission, who keeps the Council informed of its findings throughout the year. A formal assessment of each Member State's performance will take place in May/June of the following year. In November 2013, an assessment of the CSRs implementation was attached to the AGS report, and it provides a wealth of information on the CSRs, as well as their justification. As indicated above, the NRP Guidance Note prioritises the monitoring of the implementation of CSRs in the Reports, and includes an Annex specifically designed to facilitate this analysis. You can consult the reporting tables listed in Annex II of the NRP Guidance Note [here](#).

National Social Reports (NSRs)

The National Social Reports are not officially part of the European Semester or Europe 2020, but they are supposed to play a crucial link role between Europe 2020 and the Social OMC, underpinning the social dimension of the NRPs in the Semester. 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, including by the Independent Experts, who review national performance and report to the Commission. 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 (see the 2012 one [here](#)). In 2013, an internal NSR Questionnaire was completed, but not made public.

The Structure of the National Social Reports is also set out in a [Guidance Note](#), dispatched to National Governments on 4 December 2013. The SPC decided that full national strategic social reporting will take place in 2014, focussing, as usual, on the progress in achieving the OMC objectives. The NSRs will be submitted in the same time as the National Reform Programmes, or as soon as possible after that. To avoid double reporting, a cross-reference system should be put in place between the NRP and the NSR. The Guidance Note does not include any reference to countries receiving emergency external financial assistance - which can be construed as the NSRs being compulsory for all 28 Member States. Also, the Guidance Note indicates that the 2014 reporting will have a thematic focus, namely **access to social protection for young unemployed persons**. Member States are asked to report on access to minimum income schemes / social assistance, acquisition of pension rights, unemployment benefits, and health care services. The structure of the NSR is equally outlined in the Guidance Note (see full details by clicking on the link above):

1. Introduction (2p maximum)
2. A decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion (1.5p maximum)
3. Recent reforms in social inclusion policies (3p maximum)
4. Recent reforms to achieve adequate and sustainable pensions (3p maximum)
5. Accessible, high-quality and sustainable health care and long-term care (3p maximum)

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Indicative Timeline

	European Semester / Europe 2020 National Reform Programmes¹	Social OMC National Social Reports
17 November 2013	The European Commission issued its Annual Growth Survey (AGS), which sets out EU priorities for next year	
February 2014	The Council formations – The Social Protection SPC/EMCO/EPC, EPSCO, ECOFIN and the European Parliament discuss the AGS.	The Social Protection Committee endorses its 2013 Annual Report.
20-21 March 2014	European Spring Council issues guidance for national policies, on the basis of the AGS.	
15 April 2014	Member States submit their National Reform Programmes.	Member States submit the National Social Reports.
May 2014	The European Commission assesses the NRPs – after the EP elections.	
June 2014	The European Commission provides Country-Specific Recommendations. The European Council endorses them (26-27 June).	
July 2014	The Economic and Financial Council adopts the CSRs.	
Autumn 2014	National Semester: Member States present their budget draft to their Parliaments and implement their NRPs and the CSRs.	The Social Protection Committee releases its 2014 Annual Report.
15 October 2014	Member States in the Euro area present their national budgets to the European Commission for surveillance	
June 2014	The European Commission provides Country-Specific Recommendations. The European Council endorses them (26-27 June).	

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¹ Presented at the same time as Stability or Convergence Programmes.

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 \(AGS\)](#)

As indicated in the first section of this Toolkit, the AGS is the document that launches the European Semester, by setting out the broad EU economic priorities for the year to come. It is the first step in the annual cycle. This year’s document retains the same Priority 4 – *Tackle Unemployment and the Social Consequences of the Crisis* – as in the previous two years. The main message of the document is that Europe is starting to come out of recession, a fact supported also by the fact that countries like Ireland and Spain have ended their “Troika” programmes. The implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations is picked up. While the document recognises that poverty and unemployment are still growing, the emphasis is placed on active labour market policies, and particularly the Youth Guarantee. Child poverty is highlighted, as well as Active Inclusion, but the latter is mentioned from the narrow perspective of one-stop shops, thus linking activation with welfare provision, and improving efficiency, rather than quality of delivery, with limited references to progress on adequate minimum income or defence of quality social protection systems. The EAPN Secretariat prepared a [Press Release](#) following the launch, based on a letter sent to the General Affairs Council and the European Council in December, and has prepared a [short response](#), which was discussed with members at the EU ISG meeting in February. This highlights positive areas that may be useful to quote, as well as missed opportunities and key Recommendations.

[Joint Employment Report \(JER\)](#)

The Joint Employment Report forms an Annex of the AGS and reviews national policies meant to reach the employment, education, and poverty-reduction targets of Europe 2020, as presented in the National Reform Programmes. The document makes no concrete recommendations, but recognises that unemployment has reached unprecedented levels, while segmentation of the labour market means insecure employment particularly for young people, and pay gaps particularly for women. Job creation and quality jobs are missing dimensions, as well as tackling in-work poverty. The approach to poverty continues to be seen primarily as “employment –only”. Active Inclusion is not mentioned as such, but some recognition is given to declining household incomes, especially due to fiscal consolidation efforts over the past years. There is a strong focus on health, and less on other services and minimum income. The above-mentioned response to the AGS package, prepared by the Secretariat with members, will include a reaction to this document.

[Social Investment Package \(SIP\)](#)

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 important initiatives from the European Platform against Poverty, including the Commission Child Poverty Recommendation, Active Inclusion Implementation Report, Tackling Homelessness and Housing Exclusion 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, followed by a [response](#). In November 2014, the [SIP Roadmap](#) was published, which highlighted the progress made on specific areas, and planned activities in 2014 and 2015

Social Dimension of the EMU

The Communication from the European Commission was adopted in October 2013, and it is aimed at reducing growing divergences (social imbalances) between Member States, as regards poverty, inequality and unemployment in order to improve macroeconomic stability. It rests on three main pillars: 1. Reinforced surveillance of employment and social challenges and policy coordination; 2. Enhanced solidarity and action on employment and labour mobility. 3. Strengthened social dialogue. The main proposal is to introduce new social and employment indicators into the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure (MIP), and to develop a key Employment and Social Indicators Scoreboard, drawing on existing social and employment indicators, to strengthen coordination of social policies, such as unemployment, NEETs, disposable income, at risk of poverty and inequalities (the latter being a new and welcome improvement). Social dialogue will also be strengthened, including through the European Semester and Europe 2020, particularly on the CSRs, but there is no mention of civil society (for instance, the social partners' views on the AGS were made public on the European Commission's website). Implementation and impact are not clear, especially in light of the lack of "triggers" for action and proposals for ex-ante conditionality. The Scoreboard was introduced for the first time into the Joint Employment Report, but with no proposals. The Council will make further proposals on the use and implementation this year, but it is likely that the Scoreboard will not become operational before 2015.

European Council Conclusions

The most important Council Conclusions to quote will be the Spring Council 2014. However, past Conclusions can provide a useful reference.

Spring Council (14-15 March 2013)

The focus is on competitiveness, growth and jobs, with the Single Market as main driver, and emphasis is placed on the implementation of economic governance, and deepening the Economic and Monetary Union. Not much is positive, except rhetoric on combating tax evasion, stepping up the Financial Transaction Tax, and addressing unemployment, including youth unemployment, with ESF support for the Youth Employment Initiative.

June Council (27-28 June)

Strong focus on Youth Employment, and agreement to implement the 'Youth Guarantee', mobilising all instruments, including Structural Funds, and preparing for the Youth Employment Initiative. The main macroeconomic message continues to be that 'growth and fiscal consolidation are mutually reinforcing'.

October Council (24-25 October)

The focus remains on growth, job creation and competitiveness, while the dominant theme is completing the Economic and Monetary Union through increased economic coordination and surveillance. However, there is a stronger recognition of the need for stronger democratic

legitimacy and accountability, albeit without concrete measures. The Council also welcomed the Commission's Communication on the social dimension of the EMU, emphasised the need for social dialogue (no civil dialogue though) and reaffirmed commitment to combating youth unemployment, as the key objective in economic and social policy.

[December Council \(19-20 December\)](#)

The Council maintained the rhetoric of previous Councils, supporting the Single Market, growth and competitiveness. Positive points include supporting job creation and fighting unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, but marred by backing of more liberalisation of labour markets and more low wages. It reinforced the call against tax fraud and evasion. A particular focus is creating 'partnerships for growth, job and competitiveness' – meaning the signing up of MS to 'contractual arrangements', which would legally bind them to a recipe of 'growth enhancing measures', based on the NRPs and taking into account the CSRs. National Parliaments, social partners and "other relevant stakeholders" are meant to provide 'ownership' of these agreements. Also positive is the Council's backing of the new Scoreboard of Employment and Social Indicators, attached now to the Joint Employment Report, and asks for progress on how they will be used, but limits their use to 'allowing a broader understanding of social developments'.

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General Tips for Engaging in the Semester/Europe 2020 at the National Level

1. Identify is responsible for the European Semester 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. Regarding the National Social Reports, they should be prepared 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. 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 now (early 2014) and ask what process will be developed to involve stakeholders in the NRP and NSR this year. Ask to be invited as one of the stakeholders representing anti-poverty organisations and working with people experiencing poverty. You should ask what form this engagement will take and whether you will be able to comment on a draft, or can send a separate contribution. You should insist on your Government's responsibility to ensure a meaningful, timely, and structured process of consultation and involvement.

You will find useful the references supporting stakeholder involvement in European documents – please see the [Annex](#) at the end of this document (click on the link for quick access).

EAPN's overall aim is not to be only involved in one-off consultations, but to build strong regular dialogue platforms – eg national platforms against poverty, where stakeholders regularly meet with Government representative to discuss progress on poverty reduction, and propose new actions. These should provide input to the Europe 2020 Strategy process, but not be limited only to it. See examples of [Good Practices](#) in the chapter below (click on the link for quick access).

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. Find all relevant information in the [Who to Contact?](#) section below (click for quick access).

3. Brief members and build a common position

If you are going to be able to make a submission or contribution, it is important to stimulate debate with other members of your Network or Organisation, and to develop together a common position. This brings a lot of added value to any response you might want to make, and engages the network 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 should clarify the key weaknesses of your country's draft NRP / NSR 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](#), [2012](#), and [2013](#) as well as members' shadow Country Specific Recommendations for [2012](#) and [2013](#). Another helpful document is EAPN's response to the Annual Growth Survey package ([link](#)). This may help you devise your key messages – although, in the end, each national context will be different. You can also look at the [Commission's assessment of the CSR implementation](#), attached to the AGS.

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. 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.

5. Build Review your country's CSRs

In [2012](#) and [2013](#), EAPN National Networks analyzed the Commission's Country-Specific Recommendations, as well as their implementation, and developed their own alternative proposals. It is clear that the CSRs are increasingly important, impacting on national policy priorities. Compare the CSRs prepared by your Network for your country to [those issued by the European Commission](#), commenting on how far the proposals are the same, and highlighting gaps. Prepare comments on the implementation of the CSRs – negative and positive points. Propose new Country-Specific Recommendations. This work will be carried out with the support for the Secretariat, by means of a pre-dispatched questionnaire, as well as through the EU ISG meeting in February 2014. The resulting proposals will feed directly into the NRP / NSR process, at national and EU level: you should send your proposals to your Government, as part of your NRP and input to the Semester, if you establish a more regular dialogue, but also to the independent experts. New European Semester Officers have been established, and you should contact them, with your input, and to see what support they can give to improve the dialogue process. Find all relevant information in the [Who to Contact?](#) section below (click for quick access).

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

6. Build alliances

Last years' experience of stakeholder involvement showed that there is still a lot to be desired in most countries. In the current negative context, it is also difficult to make progress on poverty on our own. It is important that you try to build strong alliances with other organizations that share our values and concerns – for example - with trade unions, but also with other NGOs (including environmental NGOs) or NGO platforms, academics, politicians, the media. 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, and to try to establish a more on-going dialogue with them. If possible, try to get your National Parliaments engaged, as there was little parliamentary involvement last year, and involve your MEPs. Also, think creatively to find ways to support the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs to have their say in all policy areas, and not to be squeezed out by overarching economic and financial constraints in the drafting process.

In 2014, EAPN will be funded by the Commission to coordinate a cross-sectoral Alliance on Stakeholder Engagement in the European Semester, involving several EAPN members, alongside and other social and green NGOs, trade unions, and other partners. The CSR Alliance will attempt to impact on the Semester and Europe 2020, by common work and advocacy. EAPN members could be looking to see how they can form such broader alliances at the national level, to improve impact. The [Semester Alliance](#) will fund 3 such pilot national alliances, to trial this approach.

7. Disseminating your message and promoting public debate

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

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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 the National Social Reports, and more broadly with anti-poverty policy. Main proposals in this direction are summarised below. See also EAPN's [Advocacy Strategy on Europe 2020 and Cohesion Policy](#), as well as [EAPN's Work Programme for 2014](#), to see how the EU ISG will engage with Europe 2020 and connected processes in 2014. For more information and support about a specific action, please contact the [Secretariat](#).

In January 2014, an important Peer review was organised by the Belgian Platform Against Poverty. It provides useful presentations and assessments of the Belgian Platform, which has been highlighted as a promising practice of promoting stakeholder engagement, including people experiencing poverty, in the European Semester and Europe 2020 processes. See below for more information about the Belgian example. EAPN, as well as BAPN, were involved with the Peer Review, and you can find all background papers, including BAPN's input, [here](#).

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

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

The **key messages** ensuing from the presentations and the workshops highlighted the following:

- There is a need to involve MPs in the consultation process, prior to submitting the NRPs / NSRs. It is already an obligation for Governments to involve National Parliaments. Members should notify the European Commission if it is not the case in their country.
- It is imperative to include and mainstream the voice of people experiencing poverty in the NRP/NSR contributions, through quotes, life stories etc, to reinforce participation, to show legitimacy, but also to make the reports more accessible to public opinion and the media.
- Involving academics and university personalities has proved to be very useful, in terms of getting media attention, but also to complement evidence from the ground with the theoretical framework of socio-economic analysis.
- Using international data, such as the GINI coefficient and other useful international statistics, can be a persuasive argument – also in showing how one country ranks compared to others in Europe and the world.
- EAPN members could set up a buddy system, where a network with more engaging experience, or who has been more successful, teams up with
- Use buddy system to share knowledge between networks with more engaging experience and those with less.

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

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

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

2. Shadow NRP or NSR / Other alternative reports

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

EAPN 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. Developing National Platforms Against Poverty

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

4. Awareness raising on poverty and Europe 2020

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

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Next Steps: Checklist and Timeline for EAPN Action

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Check</i> ✓
December 2013 – January 2014	Contact your SPC member to find out more information about the process, the timing, and who the principal contact points are.	
January 2014	Try to obtain the letter and Guidance Notes for the National Reform Programme and the National Social Reports from your Government.	
First half of February 2014 (EU ISG meeting)	Working together on Country Specific Recommendations: analysis, how far they have been implemented, positive and negative impact, new ones prepared (meeting 7 th & 8 th).	
Second half of February 2014	Contribute to EAPN's response to the Annual Growth Survey and Joint Employment Report, as it provides a good basis for clarifying priorities for engagement in 2014. Disseminate your CSR proposals.	
Second half of February, March, first half of April 2014	Continue to press for a stakeholder process on the NRP and NSR, and for your engagement with your Government, including sending any responses to drafts; use media, social media, and other channels to put forward your proposals.	
End of April 2014	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 2014 (EU ISG meeting)	Shared analysis, with the EU ISG (meeting 16 th & 17 th), of the NRPs and NSRs. Questionnaire and Synthesis Report Format to be agreed.	
July – September 2014	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 2014	Review your engagement and consider next steps – including more pro-active inputs.	
October 2014 (EU ISG meeting)	Feedback your evaluation and proposals for action (meeting 3 rd & 4 th).	

This year, EAPN will be trying to work in better collaboration with other NGOs and organisations at the national and EU level, through the new Semester Alliance. If you would like more information about this, please contact the EAPN [Secretariat](#).

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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:

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.

The Commission is deployed the so-called *European Semester Officers* in the Commission's Representations in the Member States. Many of them have already taken up their functions, and the remaining are expected to do so in the near future. They are supposed to be working in partnership with stakeholders and oversee the implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations. To find a European Semester Officer in your country, please consult the [websites of the European Commission Representations](#). EAPN has obtained a partial list, which can be accessed on EAPN's Members' Room, [here](#).

For more information, please contact the EAPN Secretariat

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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.

The exact same sentence above is reprised in the Annual Growth Survey for **2014**. IN addition, however, there are two more explicit references. “Greater ownership at national level” is identified as the first area where improvements are needed for deepening of the European Semester:

In many Member States, there is a need for greater involvement of national parliaments, social partners and civil society in the process in order to secure public understanding and acceptance of the necessary reforms. The Commission continues to recommend that the National Reform Programmes (NRP) and Stability or Convergence Programmes (SCP) be discussed with national parliaments and all relevant parties, notably social partners and sub-national actors.

The second useful reference reads as follows:

It is also clear from experience to date that national ownership of the process (and in particular of the country-specific recommendations) needs to be developed further. This is important for the democratic legitimacy of the new governance system as well as to ensure that EU level policy elements are factored into national decision making at the right time.

Guidance on the content and format of National Reform Programmes

The Note explicitly asks Member States to dedicate a specific section, 2 pages long, detailing how stakeholders were involved in the drafting of the NRP, including national Parliaments, social partners, civil society, regional and local authorities. The text clearly states:

Involvement and participation of all actors is essential to ensure ownership and facilitate external progress on the implementation of country-specific recommendations, objectives and targets. This section should thus explain the institutional process for the approval of the NRP as well as the involvement of the national institutional actors (national parliament, regional/local authorities, social partners / civil society).

The document equally says that

The comments and/or contributions of social partners and other stakeholders may be summarised here and/or provided in Annex.

The Annex do the Guidance Note also contains a very encouraging paragraph:

Involvement and close association of parliaments, social partners and representatives of civil society is essential to ensure ownership and facilitate progress on the implementation of policy recommendations, objectives and targets. Low level of involvement of such actors is one factor behind increasing criticism regarding lack of democratic legitimacy of the European Semester. Member States are invited to use the opportunity of the National Reform Programme to encourage such involvement and to report on the process as regards the preparation of the NRP and in the implementation of past guidance and commitments.

Guidance for the Strategic Social Reporting 2014

The text contains only one reference, in the section defining what should be the content of the Introduction of the NSR:

This section will briefly present [...] information on the consultation of national stakeholders and the procedure for approval (only for the National Social Reports).

Social Investment Package

Communication Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion

Involve stakeholders, particularly civil society organisations close to the target groups for social interventions, in programming and implementation and facilitate their access to funds.

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.

The Commission will work closely together with Member States in the context of the relevant Council formations, the SPC and other relevant committees to support these reflections and will continue the dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, notably in the context of the Annual Convention of the Platform against Poverty and Exclusion.

Communication Investing in Children

Promote partnership in the programming of and access to Structural Funds by involving relevant stakeholders at national, regional and local levels, in particular the relevant public authorities, social partners and non-governmental organisations, in order to mobilise action to combat child poverty.

Promote close cooperation and regular dialogue between public authorities at all levels, social partners, local communities and civil society organisations.

Staff Working Document on Active Inclusion

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.

No involvement or very limited involvement of all relevant actors in the development, implementation and evaluation of active inclusion strategies is reported by larger social networks (EAPN, Eurodiaconia, and Cities for Active Inclusion - EUROCITIES). Whilst EAPN members can highlight no current examples of participation of stakeholders in the design and delivery of an explicit AI strategy, they highlight active participation in the National Action Plans/Social Reports under the Social OMC (2000-2010) and/or NRPs, often promoting strong proposals on Active Inclusion. In the first NRPs of Europe 2020, whilst 13 National Networks were invited to participate in the NRP process (AT, BE, BG, DK, EE, FR, DE, IE, LU, NL, PT, ES, SE), the level of meaningful stakeholder participation was scored very low (2.38 of 10), with most scoring very low (AT, BG, CZ, DK, EE, IE, IT, MT, NL, PL, RO, SK, SE, UK), with only Belgium and Spain giving a positive rating (7 and 8). However, even in these countries, it was difficult to get proposals taken on board, and in the case of Spain, to get implementation.

More specifically, 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.

The successful implementation of active inclusion strategies will require well-coordinated and intensified efforts at local, national, and European levels, and this document contains concrete policy guidance to assist governments, civil society organisations, and practitioners.

Civil society organisations have reported limited involvement in the design and implementation of active inclusion strategies at national level.

Staff Working Document on Confronting Homelessness

Reinforcing partnerships and involving a wide range of stakeholders to combat homelessness including national ministries and public authorities, NGOs, charity organisations, public space controllers, healthcare, social housing and social economy actors, police and judicial system workers; mobilising volunteers.

Three elements prove to be particularly useful in improving governance when responsibilities are shared between different levels of government and NGOs: the overall leadership must remain in the hands of the public authority in charge of homelessness and housing exclusion policies; all stakeholders who participate in the programme should be consulted on policy design and implementation and there should be a consensus on the strategy.

Social Dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union

While social dialogue is extremely prominent in the Communication, civil dialogue, stakeholder involvement and exchanges with civil society are not mentioned at all in the text.

Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion

José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission

The conventions of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion offer something extremely valuable: the opportunity to gather all interested parties and discuss ways of working together. Especially important is the fact that here we have represented many people who are working on the issue of poverty really on the ground that can give us all the experience, the inputs of their daily experience. I believe we need that, at the European Union institutions and also at the governmental level.

More supportive references to stakeholder involvement are likely to be found in the upcoming Guidance Note for the NRPs, and Questionnaire for the NSR. The Secretariat will keep you informed.

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EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

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For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=327&langId=en>

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