EAPN Policy Conference 2017: Concept Note

**Beyond 2020 – What EU strategy to fight poverty, exclusion and inequality?**

**Thursday 15th June 2017, Brussels**

**Background and Justification**

**In 2010, EAPN worked hard with other Social NGOs to achieve the first poverty target mainstreamed in the main economic Europe 2020 strategy** to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth: to reduce poverty by at least 20 million[[1]](#footnote-1), delivered through the European Semester. In reality, no progress has been made, with poverty actually increasing by 4.8 million (2015) rather than decreasing, as the EU drove a pro-austerity agenda as a result of the crisis, cutting public budgets, quality of jobs, services and social protection (although since 2015 a gradual decline is evident with poverty now approaching 2008 levels). However, the existence of the poverty target and engagement in the European Semester enabled EAPN and other NGOs/social organizations to keep poverty on the agenda and to consistently challenge the role of EU macroeconomic and other policies in generating more poverty and inequality.[[2]](#footnote-2) The civil society role as stakeholders in these processes, however, continues to be rather marginal.

Although 2015 saw a **Mid-Term Review of Europe 2020**, [[3]](#footnote-3)in reality the incoming President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, had very different priorities expressed in his Political Guidelines. As a result, the Review was quietly side-lined. Because of the pressure of NGOs and social organisations, poverty and social exclusion have continued to be monitored, with increasing number of Recommendations on ‘poverty’ (Country-specific Recommendations), with some positive emphasis on adequacy/access of minimum income and social protection, social and distributional impact and on the growing divide within and between countries. However, these continue to be outweighed by the overwhelming economic priorities on stability and growth: fiscal consolidation, balanced budgets, restructuring labour markets and ‘modernizing social protection’. Although there are now some signs in favour of ‘investment’, this is mainly public guarantees to cover private risk, rather than social public investment. The poverty target did bring positive outcomes in EU funds: providing the basis in legislation for the increase in EU funds for poverty (20% of ESF to fight social inclusion and poverty) as well as increase in FEAD.

**The Commission and the EU are now looking forward beyond 2020** – **but there are deep concerns over what direction it is likely to take and what will be the impact on poverty?** New opportunities seem to have emerged with the European Pillar of Social Rights, to be presented at the end of April 2017 – however, concern is raised that this will be a pillar of principles, not rights, and with unclear impact on the fight against poverty. The adoption by the Member States of the UN of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda in 2015, and the need to deliver them within the EU, putting the commitment to end poverty and inequality at the heart of a social and sustainable, rights-based agenda, also seemed to offer new hope, as long as it supports upwards social convergence.

However, **the new threats of BREXIT, resistance to the refugee/migration crisis and growing nationalism,** have sent shock waves through the EU, with fears of a populist backlash feeding anti-EU feeling. This is leading to a tendency by the EU institutions to ‘play safe’ and stick to narrow internal market priorities, rejecting ‘social initiatives’ because they raise subsidiarity issues. The new proposals launched on the **1st March by the European Commission for the ‘Future of Europe’** only underline this tendency – presenting 5 different scenarios of more or less EU, with no mention of poverty, and with social priorities sidelined because of shared competence in the EU Treaties, (this despite the fact that the EU through the European Semester is currently intervening in Euro area MS social budgets). Further distancing the EU policies and management concerns from the day to day problems of EU citizens.

**EAPN’s view is very different**. Unless the EU can recover a ‘social heart & brain’ and ensure an effective participation and rights-based integrated strategy to fight poverty, it will be increasingly difficult to elicit support from people experiencing poverty and people on the ground for the EU, and certainly not for **more** EU. A positive vision of Social Europe, with concrete proposals and effective strategy to fight poverty could provide a key ‘selling point’ to get people to back the EU. But what should this vision be? How can we get there?

**Key Questions**

* **What integrated strategy should the EU propose to effectively fight poverty**? What can we learn from the past? What do people in poverty want and expect from the EU?
* **How should this strategy be mainstreamed into a post 2020 strategy**? Can the Sustainable Development Goals offer a better and more operational framework to take over from Europe 2020? Should this be through a re-vamped European Semester? Or another process?
* **How should we mobilize for this in the context of the Future of Europe** scenarios?

**Main Aim and Objectives of the conference**

* **Aim**

To position EAPN to contribute to and influence the post 2020 EU strategy to fight poverty, social exclusion and inequality (as part of the Future of Europe debate and follow up on the European Pillar of Social Rights)

* **Specific Objectives:** 
  + to reflect on learning from 25 years
  + to support the development of an EAPN position and strategy on post 2020 strategy to fight poverty and inequality to be agreed in the GA in November
  + to promote exchange and debate with decision-makers and stakeholders to ensure a prominent place for a rights-based strategy to fight poverty in proposals for the EU we want post 2020

**Format and outline of event**

The event will be divided into two sessions.

1. **Morning internal EAPN exchange session (9.30 -12.30)**

**Target audience:** *EAPN members including EOs**– 80 maximum*

* Prior to the conference a short discussion paper will be prepared to frame the debate to the 3 questions raised. This paper together with the outcomes from the workshops will be used to prepare an EAPN position paper to be agreed in the GA in November.
* The 5 parallel exchange sessions will provide an opportunity for EAPN members to reflect on the three questions, to exchange on their experience and learning, then build consensus on the main messages for a future strategy post 2020.
* The sessions will be developed in a participative manner through group work and plenary discussion.
* At the end of the morning session, key messages will be agreed which will be presented to the afternoon external session by 2 speakers.

1. **Afternoon External Event (2-5.30pm)**

**Target audience:** EAPN members and external Brussels-based decision-makers and stakeholders – 150 maximum.

* This will be a public event with a wide dissemination of invitations.
* It will present initial ideas/messages from EAPN morning session together with the background papers
* Get feedback and discussion with the European Commission and the Council on their ideas to move forward and the process to get to the post 2020 strategy.
* Promote discussion with EOs and other stakeholders on how to put the fight against poverty in the centre of the post 2020 agenda and help support the development of positive alliances.
* Specific attention will be made to the SDG agenda, to the follow up on the European Pillar of Social Rights and the implications of the Future of Europe proposals, in trying to move forward on driving for a transformative social and sustainable framework for post 2020.

**Provisional Timeline**

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| **Date** | **Action required** | **Responsible** |
| **8 March** | **Initial scoping with reference group** | **Bureau/Steering Group EU ISG with staff** |
| **17 March** | **Initial Discussion with EUISG** | **EU ISG/Staff** |
| **End of March** | **Agree approach to develop paper**  **Draft Agenda agreed**  **Find conference venue and logistical arrangements** | **Reference Group/Staff**  **Staff** |
| **7-8 April** | **Initial discussion with EXCO** | **EXCO/Staff** |
| **By end April** | **Draft paper sent to members for comments (on-line)** | **Reference Group/Staff** |
|  | **Draft programme and Invites to speakers sent out and to members** | **Staff** |
| **May** | **Comments received on paper(s) and integrated.** | **Reference Group/Staff** |
|  | **Invites to external guests sent out with latest agenda** | **Staff** |
| **June** | **Draft papers finalized with agenda and arrangements for the conference** | **Reference Group/Staff** |
| **July-October** | **Further development of position paper and proposed strategy.** | **Reference Group/Staff with Bureau/SG** |
| **November** | **Adoption of paper and strategy in GA** | **GA** |

***Draft Agenda***

**17th June 2017 (AM)**

**EAPN Exchange and Consensus-building session**

**9.30-12.30**

**9.00 Registration**

**9.30 Opening Plenary**

* Welcome
* Presentation of programme/workshops: objectives and method.
* Introductory presentation – to the overall themes and background papers; reality check from people experiencing poverty

**10.00 to 12.00 with short coffee break at 11.15**

* **5 Parallel Workshops**

Format of 2 speakers with short inputs (1 national and 1 EO member) then discussion of the 3 questions then key messages.

***1. What are key elements for an EU antipoverty strategy* post 2020, *based on key learning from the past***

***2. What post 2020 framework/governance process do we need?*** *What’s our learning from the European Semester/Europe 2020, what could the SDG Agenda offer?*

**3. *How can we mobilize using the current EU developments? European Pillar of Social rights and Future of Europe?***

**12.00-12.30 Plenary**

* **Feedback/combining of key messages**

**12.30-2.00 Reference Group pulls together key messages**

**Beyond 2020 – What EU strategy to fight poverty, exclusion and inequality?**

**17 June 2017 (PM), 2.00 – 5.30 pm**

**2.00-3.30: 1st Panel: What strategy is needed to fight poverty, exclusion and inequality? What can we learn from the past?**

* **Welcome and Introduction: *EAPN President***
* **EU Delivery on poverty, exclusion and inequality: *Hugh Frazer, Coordinator ESPN and Professor from Maynooth University, Ireland***
* **Proposals/learning from EAPN (2). People experiencing Poverty**
* **Response and proposals from European Commission and European Council. *Level of Thyssen’s Cabinet (Ruth Pasermans) or Director – Georg Fischer or Head of Unit Manuela Geleng; Chair of SPC or Social Minister Malta or Estonia (2)***
* **Debate with audience**

**3.30-4.00 Coffee/Tea Break**

**4.00-5.30 2nd Panel: What post EU2020 framework/governance process do we need and how do we get there? Can the SDG’s provide an answer?**

* **Reforming Europe 2020 and the Semester as a transformative instrument: *EAPN***
* **The potential of the SDGs: *key speaker from UN responsible for EU delivery***
* **Inputs from other stakeholders eg *Trade Unions, Semester Alliance, SDG watch***
* **Response from European Commission: *Timmermans cabinet/or Sec Gen: Head of Unit – Marcel Haag.***
* **Debate with audience**
* **Conclusions and final remarks.**

**5.30 Close of seminar**

***Chairing could be done by EAPN internally, or an external chair.***

1. At risk of poverty and/or social exclusion measured by an aggregate of 3 indicators: at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation and low work intensity. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See EAPN reports and position on European Semester/Europe 2020 on National Reform Programmes, Country Specific Recommendations, Country Reports, Annual Growth Survey, Draft Joint Employment report [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. EAPN prepared a joint input to members and a response. See here. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)