

TOOLKIT for EAPN members ON ENGAGING with the European Semester and the European Pillar of Social Rights

2018

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Introduction

In 2010, the **Europe 2020 Strategy** broke new ground, by establishing five concrete targets for delivering on smart, social, and sustainable growth (see more information below). This process is implemented annually through a cycle called the **European Semester**, the main instrument for economic coordination between the policies of Member States and for achieving common objectives on Europe 2020.

On the 26th April 2017, the European Commission launched its package on the **European Pillar of Social Rights** (see more information below), a comprehensive initiative of 20 social policy principles, aimed at supporting well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems, with a focus on better integrating and delivering on social concerns. Much of the implementation of this initiative will take place through the **European Semester** framework.

There is therefore a strong case to be made for **the need to urgently and actively engage with these processes**, to ensure that people and planet are put before profit, and that we are moving towards a social and sustainable Europe. Here are the main reasons why:

1. These are dominant EU policy process for delivering on the EU's economic, employment and social priorities and could provide a **development framework for the European Union and its Member States**, setting out a vision for the future of Europe.
2. **They are direct drivers for EU funding opportunities**, most significantly Structural Funds, which are explicitly linked to the Europe 2020 targets, hence it brings clear benefits to national organisations who engage.
3. The Europe 2020 strategy includes **key targets to reduce poverty**, increase employment and tackle educational exclusions, **but progress has been limited, particularly on the poverty target**.
4. The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a **framework rooted in a rights-based approach** and covers a number of **key social policy domains crucial to the fight against poverty**; it is also expected that the Pillar will play a significant role in the shaping of post-2020 strategy and the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework.
5. **Stakeholders, including civil society, are supposed to be key partners in the delivery at national and EU level**. However, their involvement remains so far very marginal, with limited engagement and minimal impact on the policy proposals.

This **Toolkit** is designed to help EAPN members engage during 2018 with the European Semester, delivering on Europe 2020 goals and targets, especially the poverty target, as well as the policy priorities of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It is in line with EAPN's Strategic Plan and Work Programme 2018, 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 processes, as well as suggesting different ways of involvement.

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 [EAPN Europe staff team](#).

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 to at least 75%.
- To achieve the target of investing 3% of GDP in R&D (research & development).
- To reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels, increase the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption to 20%, and achieve a 20% increase in energy efficiency.
- To reduce the rate of early school leavers to 10% and increase the share of the population aged 30–34 having completed tertiary education to at least 40%.
- **To reduce the number of Europeans living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million.**

However, according to the most recent [Eurostat](#) data, progress on these targets has been unequal. We are highlighting below the most important targets for EAPN and for our joint work:

Europe 2020 targets	2010 data	Latest available data (2016)	Shortfall
<i>1. Increasing the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 to at least 75%</i>	68.6%	71.1%	-3.9%
<i>4a. Reducing school drop-out rates to less than 10%</i>	13.9%	10.7%	-0.7%
<i>4b. Increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education to at least 40%</i>	33.8%	39.1%	-0.9%
<i>5. Lifting at least 20 million out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion</i>	0.5 million increase (compared to the 2008 base year)	0.9 million increase (compared to the 2008 base year)	-20.9 million people

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 coordination. The key stages in the European Semester are as follows:

- **In November**, the Commission issues its [Annual Growth Survey](#), which sets out EU priorities for the coming year. It is discussed in the European Parliament and the Council.
- **In December-January**, the Commission holds bilateral meetings with the Member States, on the process and priorities, and what they mean for each country, as well as the upcoming Country Reports and the state of play of the implementation of Country Specific Recommendations.
- **In February**, the European Commission issues the [Country Reports](#), tailoring EU priorities (as defined by the Annual Growth Survey) and the implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) from the previous year (see below), as well as highlighting key areas of intervention for each Member State. In 2018, they will exceptionally be released on 7 March.
- **In March**, the Commission holds a second round of bilateral meetings with the Member States, to collect feedback on the analysis presented in Country Reports.
- **In March**, EU Heads of State and Government (i.e. the European Spring Council) take stock of the overall macroeconomic situation and of progress towards the Europe 2020 targets, and provide policy orientations covering fiscal, macroeconomic, and structural reforms.
- **In mid-April**, Member States submit their Stability / Convergence Programmes (SCPs) for 'sound public finances', as well as [National Reform Programmes](#) (NRP), which detail how Europe 2020 targets will be reached, what national policies will be implemented, and how the EU guidance has been taken into account from the Country Reports and CSRs (see below).
- **In May**, the Commission proposes [Country-Specific Recommendations](#) (CSRs) for every Member State, based on the Country Reports and the National Reform Programmes. The CSRs provide tailor-made policy advice to Member States, in areas deemed as priorities.
- **In June**, national Governments discuss the proposed CSRs also in Council formations (EPSCO and others), as well as in advisory bodies (Social Protection Committee, Employment Committee), and in the European Parliament.
- **In July**, the Council formally endorses the Country-Specific Recommendations. Policy guidance is thus given to Member States before they finalise their draft budgets.
- **In the Autumn**, the Eurozone Governments [present the draft budgets to the Commission](#) (in October), which then issues an Opinion on each (as part of the Autumn Package in November).

WHEN?	EUROPE 2020 (thematic surveillance)	STABILITY AND GROWTH PACT (macroeconomic & fiscal surveillance)
November	Autumn Package (EC) <i>(including the Annual Growth Survey)</i>	
February	Country Reports (EC)	
April	National Reform Programmes (MS)	Stability / Convergence Reports (MS)
May / June / July	Country Specific Recommendations (EC)	
October	Eurozone budget appraisal (EC)	

EC = European Commission; MS = Member States

Key Instruments – Country Reports, NRPs, CSRs

Country Reports

As of 2015, the European Commission issues [Country Reports](#) in February, which constitute a detailed analysis of the challenges faces by each particular Member State, as well as policy suggestions for tackling these. The Reports also aim at tailoring the priorities of the Annual Growth Survey to each country's specific national context, as well as at assessing the progress of each Member State in addressing the issues identified in the previous CSRs, including an in-depth review under the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure. Individual Country Reports will be presented this year on 7 March and will be, as usual, accompanied by a summarising Communication. The Reports are intended to provide the basis for dialogue with Member States in bilateral meetings, and to feed into the preparation of National Reform Programmes (as well as Stability / Convergence Programmes), to be submitted by Member States in mid-April (see below). They also provide a key moment for stakeholder engagement.

National Reform Programmes (NRPs)

[National Reform Programmes](#) are the yearly reports prepared by the Member States, demonstrating how they are implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy (past and future actions), the priorities of the Annual Growth Survey, and the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs – see below) of the previous year. They should describe their implementation of the 5 overarching EU targets to be reached by 2020 (see above), translated into national targets by each Member State. 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.

Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)

The [Country Specific Recommendations](#) are policy recommendations made by the Commission for each country within the European Semester, based on a review of that 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. The CSRs 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 / Convergence Programmes, submitted by Member States in April. The CSRs are debated in the Council formations (EPSCO etc) and their advisory bodies (EPC, EMCO, and SPC), before being discussed and endorsed by Heads of State or Government at the European Council in June. The final adoption of the CSRs in July concludes the European Semester. The work is then handed over to the Member States for implementation.

Other elements

Integrated Guidelines

The Integrated Guidelines (as mandated by the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union) frame Member States' efforts to coordinate actions in the field of economic policy and employment. These Guidelines underpin the delivery of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and provide the legal basis for Country-Specific Recommendations. The Guidelines were [first adopted in 2010](#), then revised in 2015, as part of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy. In November 2017, as part of the Autumn Package, the European Commission proposed [revised Employment Guidelines](#), to better reflect the policy priorities of the European Pillar of Social Rights (see next section), and provide a renewed legal basis for the CSRs. They are currently being discussed and amended in the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, before formal adoption.

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) is the advisory body of the Council which coordinates this process, composed of national delegates from the Ministries of Employment and Social Affairs of the Member States. It insisted, in its 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. Progress is monitored through [Common Social Indicators](#), which 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. 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. They also provide the basis for the SPC's report to the October EPSCO, which underpins the social priorities in the context of the Annual Growth Survey and the Joint Employment Report and assesses the implementation and impact of policy reforms in the field of social protections, health and long-term care.

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What is the European Pillar of Social Rights?

[The European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (EPSR) was originally announced by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in September 2015, and it is part of a greater initiative to strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), and, implicitly, its social dimension, by ensuring upward social convergence between Member States. It is a **comprehensive package of social policy initiatives**, officially adopted as a [Proclamation](#) in Gothenburg in November 2017.

Key elements of the European Pillar of Social Rights include:

- **20 policy principles** in different social policy areas
- **a Social Scoreboard of 12 indicators**, to monitor the implementation of the principles
- **a number of key legislative and non-legislative initiatives** to deliver on the principles, notably on access to social protection, access to information on employment rights, working time, and work-life balance.

Policy guidance and recommendations on the proposed 20 policy principles will be pursued through the European Semester, which will serve as main framework of implementation for the Social Pillar, at national and EU level – with the main responsibility lying with national Governments. Two Staff Working Documents (SWD) were also produced, looking at implementation of the Active Inclusion and Investing in Children Recommendations, while, at the same time, a Reflection Paper on the social dimension of Europe, proposing 3 scenarios was launched, as part of the Future of Europe initiative. You can read more in [EAPN's position paper on the EPSR](#). On 13 March 2018, the European Commission will adopt a Social Fairness Package, expected to contain a number of proposals to take further the delivery on the 20 policy principles.

While it falls short of being a transformative, integrated European strategy to eradicate poverty, EAPN's focus is to push for it to go **beyond a framework of principles and become a framework of rights that can make a real difference to people's right to a life free of poverty**.

20 policy domains

In the EU ISG meeting of June 2017, the decision was made for EAPN to focus especially on five of the [twenty policy domains](#) which make up the European Pillar of Social Rights. They are marked in bold below. EAPN strongly supports the continued reference to the Council Recommendation on Active Inclusion as key framework to support implementation, ensuring access to adequate income support, quality and affordable services, and inclusive labour markets.

Equal Opportunities and access to the labour market

- 1. Education, training and lifelong learning**
2. Gender Equality
3. Equal Opportunities
4. Active Support to employment

Fair Working Conditions

5. Secure and adaptable employment
- 6. Wages**
7. Information about employment conditions in case of dismissals
8. Social dialogue and involvement of workers
9. Work-life balance
10. Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection

Social Protection and Inclusion

11. Childcare and support to children
- 12. Social Protection**
13. Unemployment Benefits
- 14. Minimum Income**
15. Old age income and pensions
16. Health care
17. Inclusion of people with disabilities
18. Long-term care
19. Housing and assistance for homeless
- 20. Access to essential services**

Social Scoreboard

The [Social Scoreboard](#) will track trends and performances across Member States in 12 areas, and will feed into the European Semester. The monitoring process looks at levels and yearly changes of the headline indicators, as compared to EU averages, and classifies Member States in one of seven categories: *best performers, better than average, good but to monitor, on average / neutral, weak but improving, to watch, and critical situations*. The statistical results are to be interpreted in conjunction with qualitative analysis provided in the Country Reports (to be released on 7 March 2018), which will underpin the Country-Specific Recommendations (to be released in May 2018).

The headline indicators of the Social Scoreboard are:

Equal opportunities and access to the labour market:

1. Share of early leavers from education and training, age 18-24
2. Gender gap in employment rate, age 20-64
3. Income inequality measured as quintile share ratio - S80/S20
4. At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate (AROPE)
5. Young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET rate), age 15-24

Dynamic labour markets and fair working conditions:

6. Employment rate, age 20-64
7. Unemployment rate, age 15-74
8. Participants in active labour market policies per 100 persons wanting to work
9. Gross disposable income of households in real terms, per capita
10. Compensation of employees per hour worked, in euro

Public support / Social protection and inclusion:

11. Impact of social transfers (other than pensions) on poverty reduction
12. Children aged less than 3 years in formal childcare
13. Self-reported unmet need for medical care
14. Share of population with basic overall digital skills or above.

Access to Social Protection for All Workers

The Commission feels that rights and obligations associated to social protection have been developed over time primarily for workers employed on standard contracts, whereas these have been insufficiently developed for people in self-employment and non-standard employment, which has given rise to new precariousness and inequalities. The Commission wants to explore ways of providing as many people as possible with social security cover, including self-employed and gig-economy workers.

A [public consultation](#), based on a [background document](#) assessing challenges, was carried out at the end of 2017. Read EAPN's response [here](#). A proposal for a Council Recommendation outlining next steps in this area is expected to form part of the Social Fairness Package (13 March 2018).

The Commission equally launched another [public consultation](#) regarding the establishment of a **European Labour Authority and European Social Security Number**, initiatives aimed at taking forward the cross-border portability of social security rights. While EAPN did not respond, we participated in stakeholder dialogues with DG Employment on the subject. The Social Fairness Package is also expected to include proposals for follow-up on. For more details, see [here](#).

Written Statement Directive

This Directive gives employees starting a new job the right to be notified in writing of the essential aspects of their employment relationship. As it appears that many workers in the EU do not receive a written confirmation of their working conditions, or do not receive all the information they need in a timely manner, the European Commission will put forward, as part of the upcoming Social Fairness Package, a [proposal for a Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions](#). It aims to set new rights for all workers, particularly addressing insufficient protection for workers in more precarious jobs, while limiting burdens on employers and maintaining labour market adaptability. For more details, see [here](#).

Work-Life Balance Package

This initiative sets a number of new or higher minimum standards for parental, paternity and carer's leave, intended in particular to increase possibilities for men to take up parental and caring responsibilities. The most significant element is [a proposal for a Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers](#). For more details on this initiative, as well as complementary non-legislative proposals, see [here](#).

Working Time Directive

Based on a growing body of case law, the Commission is providing guidance on how to interpret various aspects of this Directive. See more details [here](#).

Future of Social Europe

The discussion on the social dimension of Europe is part of the broader debate around the Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe. In this context, the Commission published a [Reflection paper on the social dimension of Europe](#). It focuses on the upcoming transformations of the European societies and their world of work, while setting out a number of options for collective response. See more details [here](#).

Indicative Semester Timeline and Checklist for EAPN members

<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Europe 2020 / European Pillar of Social Rights</i>	<i>EAPN Action National level</i>
November 2017	22 November - The European Commission issues its Autumn Package, including the Annual Growth Survey (AGS), which sets out EU priorities for next year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact key interlocutors (see <i>Who To Contact</i> section) to disseminate the Poverty Watch and provide input for the Country Reports, and to find out more about the process and the timing. • Provide feedback on EAPN's draft response to the AGS by the staff team.
December 2017 – January 2018	The European Commission holds bilateral meetings in Member States on the Country Reports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to contact key interlocutors and to press for a stakeholder engagement process, including commenting on any drafts, and try to get engaged with the bilateral meetings in your country.
March 2018	<p>7 March – The Commission issues Country Reports, followed by a second round of bilateral meetings carried out by the European Commission in Member States.</p> <p>13 March – The European Commission releases the Social Fairness Package.</p> <p>22-23 March - European Spring Council issues guidance for national policies, on the basis of the AGS.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 - 10 March in Belgrade: Attend EU ISG meeting - working together on Country Reports and CSRs 2018. • Read the Country Report and send email written response to the staff team: to what extent is the Social Pillar mainstreamed in the Report, how far have CSRs been implemented, alternative recommendations. • Read the staff team Briefing on the Social Fairness Package. • Continue to press for a stakeholder engagement process and try to get engaged with political missions and bilateral meetings in your country.
April 2018	15 April - Member States submit their National Reform Programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read your NRP and review it together with your Network or Organisation, checking it against your inputs; issue a Press Release, send your reaction to your Government and key contacts.
May 2018	The Commission assesses the NRPs and adopts Country Specific Recommendations	Read the proposed Country-Specific Recommendations for your country, review and validate the quick response prepared by the staff team on them. Disseminate this response to key contacts.

June 2018	The Council formations and the European Parliament discuss the CSRs. The European Council endorses them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June (date tbc), in Brussels: Attend EAPN's policy conference and EU ISG meeting (joint work on the NRPs / CSRs). • Send the completed NRP questionnaire to the staff team after the meeting • Begin development of national Poverty Watch assessment.
July 2018	The Council formally endorses the CSRs.	Send your comments to the draft joint NRP assessment report prepared by the staff team.
September 2018	<p>National Semester: Member States present their draft budget to their Parliaments and implement their NRPs and the CSRs. The European Parliament adopts resolution on the CSRs.</p> <p>The Commission staff (desk officers) begin the drafting of the Country Report</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27-29 September, in Vienna: Attend EU ISG meeting and GA, joint work on the European Semester and next steps. Agree input to the upcoming 2017 Country Reports and Annual Growth Survey. Discuss work on national Poverty Watch assessment. • Disseminate the EAPN NRP synthesis report and your own inputs / reactions to your key contacts. • Finalise and start disseminating the national Poverty Watch assessment as input to the Country Reports. • Reflect on key messages for the upcoming Annual Growth Survey.
October 2018	15th October - Member States in the Euro area present their national draft budgets to the European Commission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue pressing for stakeholder engagement and try to feed into the drafting of the Country Report, using the national Poverty Watch assessment, as your other inputs.
November 2018 - January 2019	<p>The European Commission issues its Autumn Package, including the Annual Growth Survey (AGS), which sets out EU priorities for next year.</p> <p>The Commission begins a new round of bilateral meetings and fact-finding missions in countries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide input on the draft response to the AGS prepared by the staff team. • Continue pressing for stakeholder engagement and try to feed into the drafting of the Country Report, using the national Poverty Watch assessment, as your other inputs.

Throughout all our work on the European Semester, EU ISG members will lobby and directly engage to ensure follow-up for the priority policy domains of the European Pillar of Social Rights and associated Social Scoreboard, as well as will monitor to what extent this is done by the European Commission and Member States.

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Engaging at the National Level: Tips and Good Practices

1. Identify who is responsible for the European Semester in your country and at the EU level

In each delegation of the European Commission's representation in your country, a *European Semester Officer* is charged with ensuring the link on all European Semester matters. Equally, the Directorate General for Employment in the European Commission in Brussels has dedicated *country desks* working on Europe 2020, as well as on Structural Funds. These players are important both as sources of information, as well as key targets for your lobbying, so it is key to establish and maintain contact. 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. Find all relevant information in the [Who to Contact?](#) section below.

2. Ask to be invited to participate in stakeholder engagement

Write, e-mail or call the relevant contacts now (early 2018) and ask what process will be developed to involve stakeholders in the discussions on the Country Reports, the NRP and CSRs this year, as well as in the delivery of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Ask to be invited as one of the stakeholders representing anti-poverty organisations and working with people experiencing poverty, highlighting your expertise and previous engagement with these processes. You can find a suggested template letter [here](#), and useful the references supporting stakeholder involvement in European documents in the [Annex](#) at the end of this document. You should insist on your Government's responsibility to ensure a meaningful, timely, and structured process of consultation and involvement. EAPN's overall aim is not to be only involved in one-off consultations, but to build strong and regular dialogue platforms.

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 / Organisation in the work. Some members strive to include the direct participation of people experiencing poverty, which is a good practice that EAPN fully encourages. 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 and the EU policy recommendations on people experiencing poverty, building consensus on the main policy changes you think are necessary. This will help you in the preparation of Poverty Watches, as well as for providing concrete input into Europe 2020, European Semester, and European Pillar of Social Rights processes, at national and EU level.

4. Making your input: Developing key messages

Starting from the analysis and common position above, members should put together their national Poverty Watch assessment, and engage in stakeholder processes to feed it into the Country Reports. Communicate your position to European Commission representatives, such as the European Semester Officers and the country desk officers. This work can also be used as a basis for trying to influence the National Reform Programme – be prepared to send at short notice the 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 able to see a draft NRP, you will often have a very short time to respond. Having prepared your key messages beforehand will help you to be able to provide quick, but effective input within the tight deadlines. Finally, this work will enable you to quickly assess your Country –Specific Recommendations in May. You can take inspiration from EAPN’s joint reviews of the NRPs and common work on Country Reports and CSRs (see [here](#)).

5. Review your country’s Country Report and CSRs

Analyse the key weaknesses of the Country Report against your own Poverty Watch and key messages, stressing also to what extent the principles of the Social Pillar are taken into account. Try to get involved in bilateral meetings between your Government and the European Commission, through your European Semester Officer, aiming also to influence the NRP, produced by your Governments, as well as the CSRs, produced by the European Commission. It is clear that the CSRs are increasingly important, impacting on national policy priorities. Once they are released, compare the alternative 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, including how far they are taken up by the NRPs. This work will be carried out with the support for the staff team, through detailed work during EU ISG meetings, as well as through collecting written feedback in between. A consistent focus throughout will be the evaluation of to what extent the priority policy domains of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the associated Social Scoreboard, are taken on board. Make sure to disseminate both your national inputs, as well as the EU synthesis reports, to all relevant contacts.

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 – a key partner are trade unions, but also with other NGOs (including environmental NGOs) or NGO platforms, academics, politicians, the media. Useful interlocutors and allies can be the members of the Social Protection Committee and the Employment Committee (advisory bodies of the European Commission made up of national Ministry officials). Equally, the European Semester Officer in your country, and the country desk officers in the European Commission. It is important to try to establish an ongoing dialogue with them and send your inputs/messages and proposals. If possible, try to get your National Parliaments engaged, as well as your Members of the European Parliament (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. Making allies at all levels is a very important part of the process.

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 be organising national lobbying events, or getting involved with those organised by other stakeholders. Inviting high-level speakers, such as the European Semester Officer or an SPC / EMCO members, can be very useful and can also help strengthen future relations. Working in alliances (see above) will be crucial to this. 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.

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In addition to the tips provided in this section, members are invited to consult EAPN's publication [Giving a Voice to Citizens – Building stakeholder engagement for effective decision making](#) (2014), launched at the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty in Brussels. It provides common principles, concrete tools and tips to help policy makers take the important step of putting effective stakeholder dialogue into practice, drawing on concrete inspiring practice – at the EU, national and subnational levels. See below for some positive practices from our members.

Examples of Good Practices

Members of EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group have identified different ways of engaging in a more pro-active way with Europe 2020 and the European Semester, and more broadly with anti-poverty policy. Several EAPN networks have succeeded in participating in meetings with European Commission officials, as well as in different forms of dialogue with their Governments. For more information and support, please contact the [staff team](#).

EAPN Poland

The Polish Government's official Europe 2020 Platform for stakeholder involvement (Międzyresortowy Zespół do Spraw Strategii "Europa 2020") is in operation from 2012 and, after initial problems, now it enables all stakeholders to participate in the NRP drafting process. There is a one a year special working meeting focusing on poverty, as well as the opportunity to present advisory opinions on the Country Report. Our representative was active in Europe 2020 body meetings, raising issues related to poverty. The Platform sends proposals and amendments, some of which are included in the final text, others rejected with an explanation. In July 2017, the Platform was invited to attend a joint internal meeting, organised by EAPN with DG Employment, DG ECFIN, and the SecGen, to share these experiences and reflect on how better to improve dialogue. This concrete national example of cooperation also holds with valuable lessons for the partnerships needed to meaningfully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights at the national level.

For more information, please contact [Ryszard Szarfenberg](#) (EAPN Poland).

EAPN Spain

Our colleagues in the Spanish EAPN have recently drafted proposals for the National Reform Programme 2018-2019, on behalf of the Third Sector for Social Action, upon request by the Government Economic Officer. EAPN Spain also participates in the follow-up of all state-level programmes and plans, as well as the implementation of Structural Funds. On 22 March, they will organise a European Seminar, closely involving the Ministry of Social Services, the Autonomous Community of Asturias, the Municipality of Oviedo, trade unions, and civil society organisations. The European Semester Officer has equally been invited. The event will look at Europe 2020 and the post-2020 strategy, the SDGs, as well as the future implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights by the Spanish Government.

For more information, please contact [Graciela Malgesini](#) (EAPN Spain)

EAPN Portugal

There are currently more concerns to make the European Semester more visible at national level, through the media, but also online, in particular the [official website of the Government](#). The Government has also provided, for the first time in 2016, a Balance Report of the first 6 months of the NRP, giving inputs for the work that was already done and what's still missing to achieve targets. Another important action was the development of a set of public debates (6 in total) on some of the key subjects addressed in the NRP (between March and April 2016). This is an important process for the dialogue with civil society. EAPN Portugal participated in two of these debates (about Child Poverty and School Success), prepared a position paper with their views for 2017, and attended the meeting of presentation of the Spring Package and the CSRs (June 2017).

For more information, please contact [Paula Cruz](#) (EAPN Portugal)

In 2014, EAPN led a European Commission funded project called the *Semester Alliance*, bringing together EU stakeholders to impact the European Semester and Europe 2020, from a cross-sectoral social, equality, and environmental perspective. In this framework, three pilots were also supported in Bulgaria, Denmark, and Ireland, to establish similar national, broad alliances to engage in the European Semester, all led by the EAPN National Networks in those countries. While the Alliance does not receive funding anymore, the Brussels-level and the national level alliances continue their activities. See more on their [blog](#), and details about Ireland below.

EAPN Ireland

The Better Europe Alliance, Irish Civil Society Organisations for a Social and Sustainable Europe, involves a range of social and equality NGOs, the Environmental Pillar and the SIPTU trade union. The overall objective is to strengthen progress towards the social and environmental goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and to improve the level of debate and engagement of all stakeholders in the European Semester. In 2016 and 2017, the Alliance responded to the Country Report for Ireland, including proposals for the Country Specific Recommendations and National Reform Programme. Each year, the response is circulated widely (relevant Commission officials, Government Departments and Irish MEPs). The Alliance was invited to present its response to the European Semester Officers, and also to meet with the Commission's fact-finding mission to Ireland. In 2017, the Alliance was chosen as one of the stakeholders to present its response to the CSRs at a national event organised by the European Commission and the Institute for International and European Affairs. The Better Europe Alliance has also participated in a number of other national meetings and events organised by the European Commission.

For more information, please contact [Paul Ginnell](#) (EAPN Ireland)

Who to Contact?

Below you can find your best points of entry for your work on Europe 2020, the European Semester, and the European Pillar of Social Rights. You should develop an on-going relationship with them, organise joint meetings, and send them all your inputs. These contacts are nationals from your own country, or at least speak the country's language and are familiar with its context.

European Semester Officers

The Commission has deployed the so-called *European Semester Officers* in the Commission's Representations in the Member States. They are supposed to be working in partnership with stakeholders and oversee the implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations. Please consult the [websites of the European Commission Representations](#), or access a full list with contact information [here](#).

Country Desk Officers in DG Employment

Within DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, there are country desks, with teams dedicated to policy analysis and recommendations for each country. They are the main authors of the Country Reports and the Country Specific Recommendations. You can access a full list with contact information [here](#).

Members of the Social Protection Committee / Employment Committee

The [Social Protection Committee](#) (SPC) and the [Employment Committee's](#) (EMCO) are EU advisory policy committee for the Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in the Employment and Social Affairs Council (EPSCO). They are made up of representatives from national Employment and Social Affairs Ministries. Aside close monitoring of the European Semester, the SPC equally engaged with issues such as social protection, social inclusion, health, long-term care, and pensions in Member States, under the Social Open Method of Coordination.

- You can access a full list with SPC members contact information [here](#).
- You can access a full list with EMCO members contact information [here](#).

European Social Policy Network

Previously the Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, the [European Social Policy Network](#) (ESPN) was established in 2014 to provide the Commission with independent information, analysis and expertise on social policies, particularly in the framework of the Europe 2020 and the European Semester. It also acts as the staff team to the [MISSOC \(Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection\)](#). You can access a full list with contact information [here](#).

Europe 2020 Country-Specific Information

Upon clicking on [this link](#), select your country from the list. You can thus access all European Semester documents (Country Reports, NRPs, CSRs etc), as well as statistics and indicators about the progress on the national targets for Europe 2020.

For more information, please contact the EAPN Staff team:

Sian Jones, Policy Coordinator: sian.jones@eapn.eu
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Annex:

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 & Joint Employment Report

As indicated in the first section of this Toolkit, the Autumn Package (including the [Annual Growth Survey](#) and the [Joint Employment Report](#)) marks the launch of the European Semester, by setting out the broad EU economic priorities for the year to come, and assessing progress on key employment and social policy areas. Last year, it was adopted on 22 November 2017.

EAPN had sent a [letter to European Commission President](#) Jean-Claude Juncker in advance of the release, with key messages from EAPN’s joint Semester work. Following the launch, EAPN posted a [Press Release](#), as well as prepared a [full response](#), highlighting positive areas that may be useful to quote, as well as missed opportunities and key Recommendations (see below).

The Annual Growth Survey (AGS) is organised around 3 main priorities, as in previous years:

- 1) Boosting investment
- 2) Pursuing structural reforms
- 3) Responsible fiscal policies

EAPN’s Key Recommendations are:

- 1. Ensure macroeconomic policies are coherent with social rights***
- 2. Set out a roadmap with EU funding to implement the Social Pillar and reduce poverty***
- 3. Give equal weight to adequate minimum income and social protection as a right, ensuring adequate financing***
- 4. Promote quality jobs, as part of integrated Active Inclusion approaches***
- 5. Make Civil Society equal partners in the Semester!***

The main message from the AGS 2018 is that the EU is showing positive signs of recovery, and that structural reforms have yielded tangible results, enabling an opportunity to improve growth and jobs, and promoting economic and social convergence. The European Pillar of Social Rights is said to be fully integrated, focussed on skills, equal opportunities in the labour market, fair working conditions, increasing labour productivity to support wage growth and adequate and sustainable social protection. Remains to be seen how far the economic and social priorities will work as a coherent whole, backing economic policies that put ‘social rights first’, and supporting the implementation of the Social Pillar to ensure a concrete impact on poverty and inequality. The low priority given to poverty, the question of policy coherence and consistency, as well as the missing participation of civil society and people experiencing poverty, are key concerns. In terms of the Joint Employment Reports, its structure is modified in order to take full account of the European Pillar of Social Rights, with a new chapter on the Social Scoreboard, introduced to explain and monitor this new set of indicators which are part of the Social Pillar package.

See comprehensive analysis of both documents in [EAPN’s Response to the AGS 2018](#).

The European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is the flagship social initiative of the European Commission, first announced by President Jean-Claude Juncker in September 2015 in his State of the Union address, as part of a larger effort to guarantee a “Social Triple A” for Europe. Following a public consultation in 2016 on the draft proposal, the European Commission on the 26th April 2017 adopted and launched its package of initiatives on the European Pillar of Social Rights. EAPN took an active role with its members in engaging with the public consultation at national and EU level (see [here](#)).

In our input [position paper of September 2016](#), we proposed 4 steps to make the Pillar a success:

- 1) Propose a new paradigm: a transformative EU strategy;
- 2) Invest in concrete measures to guarantee social standards;
- 3) Use EU Funds to deliver on social rights, and
- 4) Champion real democracy and participation.

Once the package was launched in April 2017, EAPN welcomed the strong rhetoric on the need for social progress by reinforcing social standards, and the recognition of growing poverty and inequality as a key EU challenge. Positive elements include strong rhetoric on the need for social progress, improvements in the definition of the 20 policy domains, more clarity on the implementation through the European Semester, with the use of a Social Scoreboard to monitor progress through national reporting mechanisms, and the suggestion that EU funds will be targeted accordingly.

However, more clarification is still needed on developing a systematic approach addressing each principle, as well as the links between the scoreboard and existing EU indicator sets. Our main focus now is to ensure support, real implementation and impact, ensuring policy coherence, and participative governance. The Social Pillar will need strong commitment by Member States and the EU institutions, if it is to move beyond a framework of principles to a framework of rights that can make a real difference to people’s living standards and their right to a dignified life free of poverty, and to prevent negative austerity and other policies which undermine these goals.

In its [response paper to the Social Pillar of September 2017](#), EAPN highlighted that the priority on the European Pillar of Social Rights must now be implementation, and put forward the following Key Messages:

- 1) Clarify interpretation of key social standards related to integrated Active Inclusion**
- 2) Ensure policy coherence in the European Semester and a road map for implementation**
- 3) Make the Social Scoreboard effective**
- 4) Propose ambitious legislation to guarantee rights to social protection and minimum income for all**
- 5) Prioritize good governance and participation for people experiencing poverty and NGOs!**

You can see an overall assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the package, as well as full EAPN proposals for implementation, [here](#).

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Annex: Quotes for 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.

Employment Guidelines

The [proposal for a Council Recommendation](#) on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States mentions in **Recital 5**:

Since 2015, the European Semester has been continuously reinforced and streamlined, notably to strengthen its employment and social focus and to facilitate more dialogue with the Member States, social partners and representatives of civil society.

and in **Recital 11**:

While the Integrated Guidelines are addressed to Member States and the Union, they should be implemented in partnership with all national, regional and local authorities, closely involving parliaments, as well as social partners and representatives of civil society.

Annual Growth Survey

In **2018**, the [Annual Growth Survey](#) contains, unfortunately, no explicit mention of civil society as a key stakeholder in Europe 2020. There are five references throughout the document regarding the close involvement of social partners (pages 2, 9, and 14).

Additional useful references to stakeholder engagement, particularly civil society, could feature in the overarching communication accompanying the Country Reports, due to be released on 7 March 2018.

The European Pillar of Social Rights

[Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights website](#)

Making the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality for citizens is a joint responsibility. While most of the tools to deliver on the Pillar are in the hands of Member States, as well as social partners and civil society, the European Union institutions – and the European Commission in particular – can help by setting the framework and giving the direction.

[Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights](#)

There are only 6 mentions to the role of social partners (pages 3, 4, 6, and 7).

[Statement of President Juncker on the Proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights](#)

The Pillar – and Europe’s social dimension as a whole – will only be as strong as we allow it to be. This is a joint responsibility and it starts at national, regional and local level, with a key role for social partners and civil society. Therefore, while fully respecting and embracing the different approaches which exist across Europe, we all now need to turn commitments into action. Europeans deserve nothing less.

Additional useful references to stakeholder engagement, particularly civil society, could feature in the Social Fairness Package, due to be released on 13 March 2018.

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For more information on EAPN general publications and activities, see www.eapn.eu

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is an independent network of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union, established in 1990.



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