

9 October 2018

President of the European Commission  
Mr Jean-Claude JUNCKER

Dear President Juncker,

**AGS 2019: Leave a real Social Triple A legacy! Ensure the AGS 2019 prioritizes implementing Social Rights and the meaningful participation of Civil Society!**

On September 29, I was elected as President of EAPN Europe for the next 3 years. I'm pleased to write to you today, on behalf of the **European Anti-Poverty Network (throughout Europe) representing thousands of NGOs to present our Key Messages for the AGS 2019.**<sup>1</sup>

Our mandates will cross – my first year as President will be the last year of your mandate. During this last year, I urge you to propose **concrete results for Social Europe as your legacy**. This means **making the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) 2019 a driver for a more Social European Semester in 2019**: implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, and ensuring an equal voice for Civil Society, in line with the new Employment Guidelines.<sup>2</sup>

In your SOTEU speech you said that the EU should *'take better care of its social dimension'*, demanding that the promises made in Gothenburg should be turned *'into law'*. However, this needs to be backed by a **concrete road map or action plan** around the **implementation of the Social Pillar, setting out how all 20 Social Principles** will be implemented, backed by EU funding and through the European Semester, as well as pressing for progress on achieving binding social rights.

Your overview of 'progress made' failed to mention the **unacceptable levels of poverty and social exclusion of Europe**, still faced by 1 in 4 of the population (118 million), and the failure of the Europe 2020 poverty target. EAPN members in the final declaration<sup>3</sup> of the 2018 General Assembly called for a **Poverty Free Europe**, and I would ask that you, in your final year as President of the EU, help make this a reality by recognising the limits of the European development model and the negative impact of a decade of austerity, and inviting the next Commission to reorient macroeconomic policies to reduce inequality and poverty and guarantee wellbeing. Concrete solutions include calls for an **integrated anti-poverty strategy** ensuring access to quality jobs, adequate social protection including minimum income and universal services, underpinned by Social Rights.

The focus on the 'future of Europe' is vital but EAPN members call for a 6<sup>th</sup> scenario<sup>4</sup>, **which can offer a more ambitious social, sustainable and democratic vision rooted in the SDGs and the Pillar of Social Rights** – proposals for a post Europe 2020 strategy must reflect this vision! It is crucial that your Commission puts in place an open and participatory process to develop this post-2020 strategy, one which meaningfully responds to the views of civil society and people experiencing poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> EAPN is the largest platform of anti-poverty organizations in Europe, representing more than 6000 organisations across 31 countries, working with and for people with direct experience of poverty.

<sup>2</sup> Council Decision 2018/1215 of 16 July 2018 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States.

<sup>3</sup> Final Declaration of the EAPN General Assembly, September 29 2018.

<sup>4</sup> EAPN Position Paper: Future of Europe (September 2018)

### *Specific Messages for the AGS 2019*

EAPN members have engaged in every stage of the European Semester, inputting and reviewing the [Country Reports](#), the [Country-specific Recommendations](#) and the new [EAPN Assessment of the 2018 National Reform Programmes](#) and [Country Annex](#)<sup>5</sup> The main message is that despite the proclamation, Member States appear to be giving little priority to social rights, and still failing to offer quality engagement to civil society.

Whilst welcoming the **important commitments made to ‘rebalance’ the European Semester by promoting social and economic convergence, the overall EU approach continues to be dominated by macroeconomic priorities** of austerity. There is a failure to analyse and address who benefits and who loses, particularly for tax/benefit policies, but also from flexible labour markets and privatisation of services. Most importantly, there is little sign of commitment for a more social and sustainable model of growth – in line with the SDGs and Social Pillar where social investment in quality jobs and universal social protection and services, financed through tax justice, underpin a sustainable development model.

Meaningful engagement of **Civil society organizations working with people in poverty is also a prerequisite to ensuring delivery on social rights**, but they are still not treated as key partners in the Semester process. With the adoption of the **new Employment Guidelines**<sup>6</sup> (Recital 11) with civil society specifically referenced as equal partners in the European Semester, we would expect to see concrete proposals to reflect this change: developing a framework to ensure effective, structured dialogue with civil society at EU and national level, on a par with that established with social partners; giving concrete written guidance to European Semester Officers to promote this rebalancing; and establishing a fund to support engagement at the national level, particularly encouraging work in alliance between Social NGOs and cross-sectorally.

Below we highlight the key messages from the [EAPN NRP 2018 Assessment: Make Participation a Driver for Social Rights!](#) The detailed recommendations can be found in the Annex below.

### **AGS 2019 must give explicit priority to implementing Social Rights and participation of Civil Society!**

#### **Key Recommendations for AGS 2018<sup>7</sup>**

- 1. Ensure macroeconomic policies promote social rights and poverty reduction***
- 2. Progress on poverty + social rights with a rights-based integrated strategy/action plan***
- 3. Implement quality employment policies that ensure that nobody is left behind***
- 4. Invest in equal access to universal, free, quality public education and holistic lifelong learning, as well as vocational training***

<sup>5</sup> [EAPN Assessment of 2018 National Reform Programmes: Make participation a driver for social rights! \(Sept 2018\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> Council Decision (2018/1216 – 4 September 2018) on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, Recital 11 “ *should be implemented in partnership with national, regional and local authorities, closely involving parliaments, as well as the social partners and representatives of civil society*”.


<sup>7</sup> See Annex for detailed recommendations.

***5. Increase EU funds for measures supporting integrated anti-poverty strategies, delivered with civil society organizations!***

***6. Make partnership with people in poverty a driver for Social Rights - embedding regular, meaningful dialogue with people facing poverty and NGOs***

I look forward to working with you over the next year, and I hope that you will give full consideration to EAPN's proposals in your deliberations on the AGS 2019. Our Brussels office will follow up directly to organise a meeting with you to discuss our recommendations.

Yours sincerely,



Carlos Susias  
EAPN President

## ANNEX

### Detailed recommendations from NRP Assessment and for AGS 2019

#### 1. *Ensure macroeconomic policies promote social rights and poverty reduction!*

- **Mainstream social/distributional impact assessment** of macroeconomic policies to ensure they deliver on social rights and reduce poverty and inequality.
- **End austerity and recognise social spending as an investment in education, health, security and productivity** including through allowing greater fiscal flexibility on investment in social protection and key public services including quality, affordable health/long-term care, social services, education and social housing.
- **Increase tax revenues and re-energise their primary role as a redistributive mechanism for public good:** promote more progressive taxation, stronger legal and enforcement measures against tax evasion and avoidance and the introduction of new or reinvigorated financial instruments – eg a Financial Transactions Tax and wealth taxes.

#### 2. *Progress on poverty + social rights with a rights-based integrated strategy/action plan*

- **Accelerate progress on the poverty target and set new ambitious targets** with clear triggers for policy recommendations (CSRs) when sufficient progress isn't made; ensure a continuation and strengthening of the targets in any post 2020 strategy, linked to the SDG goals.
- **Prioritize development of an ambitious rights-based integrated anti-poverty strategy** ensuring universal access to quality social protection including adequate minimum income, public quality services, quality jobs and social participation, across the life-cycle. For target groups support agreed EU integrated approaches e.g. in “Tackling housing exclusion and homelessness” and “Investing in Children”.<sup>8</sup>
- **Implement the Social Pillar by driving up social standards and social rights** – adopt an Action plan and monitor progress on all principles, extending the scoreboard in the European Semester, starting with adequate minimum income, universal social protection, fair wages, access to services (particularly housing and health) and education/lifelong learning.

#### 3. *Implement quality employment policies that ensure that nobody is left behind*

- **Step up strategies to promote gender equality and close the gender pay gap, and targeted support for specific groups** eg minorities, migrants, young/old people, people with disabilities;
- **Promote decent, sustainable and good-quality jobs** by investing in quality job creation, fostering living wages and security in the workplace and by curbing precariousness

- **Prioritize the fight against in-work poverty and ensure that paid work can provide a sustainable route out of poverty** by adjusting tax, subsidy and regulation to create a more level playing field.
- **Support comprehensive Active Inclusion approaches**, particularly for long-term unemployed people, guaranteeing personalized, integrated support that goes beyond employment (i.e. encompassing adequate income support and quality, affordable services).
- **Recognize the value of positive incentives** and eliminate practices and narratives of negative conditionality that injure autonomy, health and social respect, increase social divisions and are ineffective in supporting access to sustainable work that takes people out of poverty.

#### ***4. Invest in equal access to universal, free, quality public education and holistic lifelong learning, as well as vocational training***

- **Adopt a comprehensive vision of education and lifelong learning** that goes beyond the needs of the labour market, ensuring that targets and indicators capture reality.
- **Promote free, inclusive and universal public education**; ending discrimination and segregation ensuring nobody is left behind.
- **Raise the quality of education and integrate anti-poverty goals in educational policies and budgets**: ameliorating and making more accessible the curricular and extra-curricular offer of schools; investing in infrastructures; increasing childcare support, early childhood care.
- **Ensure access for workers and jobseekers (especially youth) to adequate upskilling and/or training programmes**, adapting them to the needs of disadvantaged people, and ensuring universal access to adult education, including 2<sup>nd</sup> chance.
- **Reinforce quality and inclusive lifelong learning**, beyond merely employment-related needs, by supporting informal or non-formal learning approaches supporting personal and community development.

#### ***5. Increase EU funds for measures supporting integrated anti-poverty strategies, delivered with civil society organizations!***

- **Social Inclusion is not just about employment!** – Projects must deliver on anti-poverty right-based strategies founded on integrated active inclusion and concrete anti-discrimination measures.
- **Increased role of EU funds to fight poverty and social exclusion in the MFF**  
EAPN calls for a Budget that should respect the SDG principle of ‘Leaving No-One Behind’ and recognize the eradication of Poverty and Social Inclusion as public goods and collective responsibility, with 30% of ESF+ and a dedicated poverty programme.
- **Enforce delivery of the partnership principle involving small NGOs and people in poverty** with more pro-active monitoring and enforcement of the code of conduct regarding quality of engagement of civil society actors allowing them to be effective partners in the Monitoring Committees and in delivery.

#### ***6. Make partnership with people in poverty a driver for Social Rights - embedding regular, meaningful dialogue with people facing poverty and NGOs***

- **Make the NRP a true strategic plan for social and inclusive development** drawing on the European Pillar of Social Rights and the SDGs and embracing Civil Society as a key partner. Establish ambitious **new goals** and **clear, compulsory common guidelines** on the Semester governance processes underpinned by the new employment guidelines, involving all relevant actors in a quality engagement.
- **Embed quality standards for meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty and NGOs** at all stages of the policymaking process, providing them with support and **financial resources to build capacity** to contribute equally and effectively, supported by EU funds. **Quality standards indicators** should be agreed and monitored throughout the Semester process (NRPs, Country Reports, bi-lateral dialogues, AGS/ Joint Employment Report). **Mutual learning** on best practices to encourage upward convergence.