



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

REPORT

# IS THE 2019 EUROPEAN SEMESTER MORE SOCIAL?

## EAPN Assessment of the European Semester 2019

September 2019



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# Introduction and Key Messages

## Introduction

2019 marks a crucial transition year for the EU, following the elections of the new European Parliament and the new President of the European Commission, Council and Parliament. It is also the 9<sup>th</sup> year of the Europe 2020 strategy and the 2<sup>nd</sup> following the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights, delivered through the European Semester as the main ‘economic and social coordination instrument’. 2020 will mark the end of the current Europe 2020 strategy and the launch of a new one. However considerable question marks hang over what progress has been achieved on the main objectives including the poverty target<sup>1</sup> and implementation of the Social Pillar. Are people really becoming the heart of EU policy? Is the European Semester being made fit for purpose? Or is it still relying on trickle-down theory, prioritising growth, reducing deficits, tackling macroeconomic rather than social imbalances?

This report sets out to assess how far the European Semester in 2019 has supported progress towards the “social Triple A” promised by the Juncker Commission in terms of delivery on social rights and the Europe 2020 poverty reduction target, as well as promoting participation of civil society and people facing direct experience of poverty. EAPN will carry out a full review of Europe 2020, delivered through the Semester, next year with its members.

Although 2019 has finally seen some welcome progress towards the poverty target – with a 5 million reduction since 2008 –<sup>2</sup>, 113 million (22.5%) are still at risk of poverty and social exclusion (AROPE). However, much higher levels are experienced by children and other groups like single parents, migrants, Roma and ethnic minorities and the long-term unemployed. With rapidly growing in-work poverty (9.6%) and a widening poverty and inequality gap across the EU, where in 3 Member States over a 1/3 of people face poverty (38.9% BG, 35.7% RO, 34.8% EL), can we be complacent about a more social Semester?

Some important shifts in the rhetoric of the Semester were noted this year, recognising that “*growth is not benefiting all citizens*” and ensuring that the Social Pillar, particularly the social scoreboard was more visible in the main EU documents of the Semester<sup>3</sup>. Whilst national networks note some progress<sup>4</sup>, poverty and social rights have not been prioritised equally through all Country Reports and Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs), and often more weakly picked up in the National Reform Programmes. However, it is the lack of mainstreaming and coherence with the macroeconomic policies which is of most concern. The social ‘section’ and CSRs are still too likely to remain a ‘box’ side-lined and undermined by the dominant macroeconomic priorities: flexibilising labour markets and ‘modernising’ welfare states driven by requirements for fiscal sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> Europe 2020 poverty target to reduce those in poverty by at least 20 million by 2020 by aggregate at risk of poverty indicators: at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation and low work intensity (AROPE).

<sup>2</sup> Having reached a peak of 123 million in 2013 at the height of the crisis.

<sup>3</sup> 2019 Country Reports and Country-Specific Recommendations.

<sup>4</sup> See EAPN 2019 Country Report assessment ‘No time for Complacency’ (May 2019) and EAPN 2019 Country Specific Recommendation assessment 2019 with Country Annex (July 2019).

Positive news in 2019, was that the European Semester welcomed for the first time Civil Society as a key partner,<sup>5</sup> recognising our role to *'improve ownership, legitimacy and better socio-economic outcomes'*, underpinned by the new Employment Guidelines. Whilst important improvements are seen in this engagement at EU level, visibly promoted by the Commission, the same cannot always be said at national level, where civil society is often struggling to maintain its space and voice and is treated as a poor sister to social partners. However, some important progress is noted in some Member States which should provide hope. No significant progress will take place unless a stronger obligation is placed on Member States to engage civil society regularly and meaningfully in their decision-making process.

In this report EAPN presents our members' assessment of the 2019 Semester collected through an on-line questionnaire with inputs from 26 National Networks, 24 from EU Member States: (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, EL, ES, FI, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, UK), and 2 benchmarking inputs from EAPN Norway and Serbia. Further input was drawn from a mutual learning exchange in the EU Inclusion Strategies group held in Brussels on the 14-15 June involving also EAPN CY, IC, MK and SK, and the European Organisations IFSW and Age Platform Europe. The report was drafted by the EAPN Policy Team: Sian Jones, Amana Ferro and Stefania Renna, policy intern.

## Key Messages

- **The Semester must become an instrument to improve lives and well-being not just for economic growth**, including embedding effective ex-ante impact assessment to prevent negative macroeconomic approaches. Agenda 2030, the SDGs and the EPSR should shape the shift to a more social and sustainable strategy post 2020, with the eradication of poverty as a pre-requisite.
- **Progress has been made in socialising the Semester, but all social rights must be consistently mainstreamed and implemented, beyond the scoreboard**, with a separate section of equal size to macroeconomic priorities in the Country Reports and NRPs, monitoring implementation of all principles, EU 2020 targets and the SDGs.
- **All countries should receive a social CSR as the 1st priority!** All countries should be monitored on how they are delivering on all social rights and the poverty target, receiving recommendations if insufficient progress is being made.
- **Employment alone won't reduce poverty: the Commission should more consistently promote a rights-based effective anti-poverty strategy based on integrated active inclusion** which combines implementation on key social rights: to adequate minimum income and social protection, access to quality services and jobs with fair, living wages. Agreed thematic strategies for key groups should equally be promoted: Investing in Children and addressing housing exclusion and homelessness.

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<sup>5</sup> 2019 Annual Growth Survey and Draft Employment Report

- **Whilst improvements are being made more visibly at EU level, the real test is achieving systematic impact at the national level.** The Semester must be made more visible and transparent, with formal commitment by Member States to progressively implement a concrete road map with milestones to achieve progress on poverty and all social rights, monitored and supported in the implementation by civil society and social stakeholders.
- **Engagement of civil society is improving but needs concrete investment to embed meaningful dialogue processes at national level that enable impact.** This requires systematic guidelines for equal partnership for CSOs with social partners, mutual learning, transparent monitoring through the CR and NRP. It also requires new resources to build capacity and enable CSOs to provide the EU with quality information and grassroots evidence, not relying on voluntary input.
- **Dialogue with people with direct experience of poverty is essential to signpost what works/doesn't work, but also to propose viable solutions.** The EU and national direct meetings of people experiencing poverty with decision-makers are a powerful model to share and follow. EU and national funding support for autonomous anti-poverty organisations is essential to ensure that people experiencing poverty have a voice in the European Semester and wider policy making.

# 1. Overview of progress in the Semester 2019

This chapter gives an overview of progress in the Semester. It covers both positive/negative and missing elements reflecting the priority given to poverty, the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as meaningful participation of civil society organisations with people experiencing poverty, with both national governments and EU institutions.

The following chapters examine in more detail the specific content and process of engagement, ending with final comments and messages.

## 1.1 Focus and impact on poverty reduction

	A LOT	SOME	NONE	NOT SURE OR DON'T KNOW
1.1 Has the European Semester in 2019 given a stronger focus to poverty reduction and had a positive impact on poverty reduction?	0.00% 0	60.87% 14	26.09% 6	13.04% 3

### *Positive elements*

Overall 60.87% (14 national networks) confirmed that in 2019, the European Semester has given a **stronger focus to poverty reduction and had some positive impact** (BE, BG, HR, CZ, FR, DE, EL, IE, LT, MT, NL, PT, RO, ES), with 26.09% highlighting none (6) (AT, HU, LU, PL, SE, UK) and 12.5% unsure (3). This is a positive development reflecting some shift towards more social priorities in the Semester. However, there is a significant gap between the views of different Member States. Members also highlighted contradictory tendencies.

**Positive developments in falling poverty rates are highlighted in some countries** (IE, PT, RO) including in the rates after social transfers (PT), although disaggregated figures for the different indicators tell a more complex picture. Often there still remains a gap compared with pre-crisis levels (IE). Several members welcome **the stronger focus on poverty and inequality** (EE, LT, NL, ES). However, there is concern that this is not consistently reflected in all parts of the Semester nor in all countries. Whilst the **Country Report gives the strongest focus** (LT, LU, NL, ES) this is not always translated into the Country Specific Recommendation (CSR). Some highlight a specific section and focus in the NRP (IE, PT) but not in all countries. Members welcomed the **more in-depth analysis of issues related to poverty**, particularly in the Country Report (EE, IE, LT, LU). For example, in Lithuania, the Country Report highlighted the lack of financing for social security, low progressivity of tax, educational inequalities, regional disparities. However, most of these concerns were lost in the CSR, and not reflected in the NRP. In Luxembourg, there are 2 paragraphs related to social developments, i.e. poverty, exclusion, social transfers and inequality. In some, a real shift in the Country Report from only labour market focus to analysis of poverty, social exclusion and inequality is

welcomed (EE). However, these did not always translate into concrete and effective policy solutions.

The shift towards **more priority in the Country Reports and CSRs on social investment is acknowledged and welcomed by some**, for example, in **health** (BE, LV). These include overall positive reform (LV) and support to community health centres to reduce health inequalities (BE). However, accessibility/affordability is still a concern. Also, most have not been implemented so far. In others, Recommendations on investment in **social housing** was welcomed (BE) and recognition of the growing problem of **homelessness** (CZ). This was linked with recognition of the growing problem of **indebtedness** and the negative impact of enforcements and evictions (CZ). However, as housing is usually cited in the finance section, the priority is given to growth of the housing market, rather than ensuring access to affordable housing as a social right and key condition for preventing and tackling poverty.

The **effectiveness of Tax/Benefit** policy in reducing poverty and inequality remains a central concern. **Increases and extensions in coverage of Minimum Income** and other benefits (BE, PT) were welcomed, however the levels still remain below the poverty threshold. In Portugal, the increases in annual **updating of indexes** were particularly significant (e.g. index of social support, family allowance, social insertion income, solidarity supplement for the elderly, social provision for inclusion, disabilities and implementation of independent living support model). **Better action on Tax** was also highlighted. For example, in Belgium where the tax shift increased net wages. However, at the same time they raised tax on consumption goods, like electricity which people in poverty felt directly in their wallet. The increases also did not benefit other groups, e.g. unemployed people or people living on social transfers. More analysis and recognition of the poverty risk of **specific groups/households** was welcomed including child poverty (FI), particularly for children of low skilled parents, or refugees (FR), although concrete measures are often missing.

### *Negative/Missing*

The higher focus on poverty however cannot lead to complacency. Although poverty levels may have slightly declined the **overall levels are unacceptably high**, particularly in relation to pre-crisis levels. This is particularly true for the poorest countries. In Romania, 1 in 3 Romanians are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE). Despite a decline of 2% since 2016, monetary poverty is still 1 of the highest in the EU, affecting 23.6% (2017) with 41.7% of children facing poverty. Rural households face twice as high risk than cities and Romania has the highest rate of in-work poverty (17.6%), despite robust economic growth. Although the Country Report/CSRs give attention to this, there are little signs of serious implementation from the national government.

**The impact of the Semester on poverty is not always clear.** If poverty is declining, the Semester gives less priority – so the impact on national anti-poverty policy is negligible (PL). In Portugal, the main focus of the Semester has been on unemployment reduction, and although the increase in employment has contributed to improvement in household budgets, it has also contributed to very high in-work poverty. The success in raising incomes is partly because the government withstood the pressure from the EU to restrict wages and benefits (PT).

In the **richer Northern and Western European Member States**, a **low focus to poverty** is often given, despite the minimal progress on the poverty target (FI, LU, UK) and no CSRs are made. This is also due to the **priority given to the social scoreboard rather than the target**.

This assesses progress in terms of EU averages, rewarding countries who are closest or above the EU average, without considering progress towards their national target, or comparison with similar countries. In Finland, the Country Report is **overly optimistic** about achieving the target, whereas the NRP is more realistic. There is no CSR, although poverty (AROPE) has risen by 40,000. In Belgium, no progress has been made on the target to lift 380,000 out of poverty, although 102,000 more people are in poverty since 2008, but again no CSR nor structural approach or action plan.

The dominant narrative of **work as the main/only route out of poverty**, including people with disabilities and caring responsibilities, tends to undermine a rights-based integrated approach driving people towards poor jobs and increased hardship/lack of well-being (BE, UK). Whilst positive measures have been taken **on minimum income**, the levels are still inadequate and below the European poverty threshold (LV, LT, MT, UK). The lack of a **transparent benchmark to determine adequacy** of minimum income for specific households is strongly missed, for example using a reference budget (MT). A more comprehensive assessment of the **overall impact of the package of income support benefits on poverty**, exclusion and inequality and the use of conditionalities and sanctions is strongly needed. In the UK, Universal Credit is much less generous than previous Minimum Income and sanctions are more frequent and more onerous, i.e. tight eligibility and low general benefits. However, no assessment nor Recommendations have been given (UK).

**Consistent and transparent distributional impact analysis assessing the impact of tax/benefit** changes on different households is therefore essential if the real implications of changes are to be understood and acted on. For example, in Latvia, seemingly positive proposals linked to the CSRs like personal income tax reform, progressive income tax, raising the threshold of tax-free income have in reality worsened the situation of some groups, i.e. families with children and low wages/in-work poverty.

Whilst increasing attention is paid to **key at risk groups**, **some are still missing** (MT, RO, PT). For example, tackling the gender employment and pay gap (MT), early school leavers and support for equal opportunities and access to employment (RO).

Overall, there is a **lack of ambition** in the measures proposed (BE), including a clearer focus on concrete measures as part of an integrated strategy to drastically reduce poverty and ensure social inclusion (EL). This needs to be underpinned by **better diagnosis and analysis** (PT). More worryingly, **the overall coherence of the macroeconomic recommendations** is the overarching concern, risking generating more poverty (BE, FR, EL, UK). This is particularly noted where there are CSRs to reduce deficits and public debt and cut public expenditure on public services and on pensions (FR). Even in the UK, where the Semester has limited impact, the EU's fiscal rules and recommendations are in line with UK permanent austerity approach which has seen a reduction in public spending in relation to GDP from 44.9% to 38.5%.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 2017/18 data quoted in the 2019 NRP.

## 1.2 Effective mainstreaming of the Social Pillar

	A LOT	SOME	NONE	NOT SURE OR DON'T KNOW
1.2 Are social rights more strongly present in the European Semester?	0.00% 0	69.57% 16	8.70% 2	21.74% 5

### Positive elements

69.57% say that **social rights are somewhat present in the European Semester** (16) ( AT, BG, HR, CZ, FI, FR, EL, IE, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, ES, UK) with 8.70% (2) (BE, LU) denying this, and 21.74% not sure (5). In Belgian’s case they outline that social rights are somewhat present but not more strongly than in 2018.

Some members highlight that the **European Pillar of Social Rights is more clearly visible** in the 2019 Country Reports (AT, RO, ES) but more rarely in the CSRs (FR) or mainly in the preamble (IE). The Romanian Country Report said clearly that Romania performed poorly on the EPSR. It is much less visible in the NRPs, but the exceptions are notable (IE, PL, PT). The Irish NRP says the **EPSR is a blueprint laying out a vision of EU social policy** in the coming decade supports and will align policies to it. However, no further reference is made in specific policies. In Portugal, the 2019 NRP mentions the EPSR for the 1<sup>st</sup> time. In general, however, the Pillar is reflected by the **Social Scoreboard indicators** (AT, BE, FI) often in a box. However, some note an improved analysis (IE).

Several members, however, highlight **new concerns, linked to the Social Pillar principles**. For example, the focus on **well-integrated services for unemployed** is evident, although linked to improving incentives to work, which could mean increased conditionality and negative sanctions (FI). Equal **access to health and social care** is also evident but linked to concerns of cost-effectiveness/could lead to cost cutting (FI). Others highlight a stronger focus on **homelessness** (IE), **childcare** (IE) and **adequate social protection** for the self-employed (NL). **Rising inequality is also increasingly underlined** – recognising that “*many people have yet to reap the social benefits of the economic upturn*” (IE).

The **new Annex D** is seen as a promising initiative, with a policy objective dedicated to creating a more social Europe and implementing the EPSR. However, the focus needs to be on all social rights, not just activation, with implementation monitored more transparently (BE). “*New and promising this year was the annex D. This annex is the starting point for the future dialogue between the Commission and Member States on where the use of the EU funds should be targeted. Policy Objective 4 is even fully dedicated to creating a more social Europe by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. This fourth objective could be promising to help implementing the EPSR in Belgium. Unfortunately, in the Country Report we see that the focus here is almost solely on labour market activation and not on other social rights as for instance on adequate minimum income benefits, fair working conditions and wages, or the right to access essential services.*” (EAPN BE)

## Negative/Missing

Despite this greater visibility to the EPSR, most members did not feel this translates into a **real priority for social rights** (BE, EL, IE, LV, PL, ES). This was primarily due to the overall objectives and priorities of the Semester. *“The rights-based approach is not visible due to **the economic nature of the Semester** – it’s about macroeconomic imbalances and public finances. Social issues are assessed by impact on growth/GDP”* (EAPN PL). The **clear priority is reducing government debt** by limiting government expenditure and **ensuring fiscal sustainability, particularly of health**, long-term care and pensions. This clearly undermines progress on social rights. This is further reflected in the low focus on adequacy of income support and benefits in some countries (FI). Where countries are emerging from Emergency Assistance Programme arrangements the missing focus on social rights is deeply concerning. For instance, in Greece, where the text talks about promoting social rights, but the CSRs themselves are concerned with only debt/deficit control and have no Social CSR.

Surprisingly **few Member States reference the EPSR in the NRP**, and still less set out how they will implement it (AT, BE, LV, UK). In Poland, the original draft made no mention of the EPSR, and then finally included a sentence proposed by EAPN PL: *“The Government fully supports EPSR and will implement it with the support of ESF”*.

Even when a focus is given to Social Rights, **employment rights are dominant** (BE). Specific target groups and issues are often missing (e.g. older people, mental health – FI). Although some social pillar principles are reflected, they are outweighed by the **social scoreboard** indicators. Whilst these indicators are important, they **do not do justice to the full set of 20 principles** (BE). The scoreboard focus on EU averages also tend not to encourage ambition (BE, FI), and risk **undermining upward social convergence**. More encouragement to comparison between peers would be welcome (BE).

Most concerning is the **lack of consistency and coherence in the CSRs**. For example, in Portugal, where the social right to adequate wages was strongly supported by the Government - increasing the minimum wage, the Commission warned against such action because of its negative impact on stability and growth. At the same time, CSR 2 underlines the need to improve adequacy of the safety net, reflecting the impact of the social scoreboard indicator on **effectiveness of social transfers on poverty**.

## 1.3 Improvement of participation of civil society in the Semester

	A LOT	SOME	NONE	NOT SURE OR DON'T KNOW
1.3 Has participation of civil society organisations improved at national level?	0.00% 0	45.45% 10	40.91% 9	13.64% 3

### Positive elements

Nearly half of the networks responding (45.45%) felt that **Civil Society participation had improved in the Semester (10)** (AT, BE, HR, CZ, DE, LT, MT, PL, RO, ES) with 40.91% (9) (EE, FI, HU, IE, LV, LU, NL, SE, UK) saying there was no improvement, and 13.64% (3) not sure. (See section 4 for further detail on participation). However, both Ireland and Finland underlined that although they couldn't highlight new improvements, they already had good relations particularly with the European Semester Officers.

Overall, the **main area of progress in terms of Civil Society engagement is with the European Commission, i.e. the European Semester Officers** and to a lesser extent the Desk Officers, as well as EU management level. The vast majority of respondents (72.73%) highlighted establishing a **better connection with the ESOs**, particularly in comparison with their national government representatives in the Semester (AT, BE, IE, PT). This might involve meetings, sending their Poverty Watches<sup>7</sup> and other inputs prior to the Country Report. For example, EAPN LT sent their Poverty Watch to both and felt their concerns were reflected in the Country Report. EAPN BE met with the ESO and felt their concern with social housing was picked up.

Where there is civil society **engagement in the NRP, it is generally seen as a very formal affair** with little real participation. However, 40.91% still see some improvement. Some are invited to a kick-off meeting (AT) or asked to comment on the draft NRP (NL), but with uncertain impact. The most successful engagements with Governments are with long-standing **working groups or task forces** – e.g. Poland which has a long-standing **Inter-ministerial Task Force** on Europe 2020. However, EAPN members have to continually forge a new role for themselves by organising their input/evidence, e.g. in Poland EAPN presented the Poverty Watch at the meeting on a par with the Ministry and Statistics Poland. Other Member States seem to have trialled different mechanisms like thematic workshops, for example in Portugal in 2017, but these have been since dropped. Too few feel they have established a systematic engagement with both the Commission and the Government (IE, PL, ES).

A few members have engaged in **cross-sectoral alliances** which has enabled them to have better access and impact, particularly with the Semester Officers and the Commission, but

<sup>7</sup> EAPN Poverty Watches are reports developed by EAPN national networks to track main national trends and concerns on poverty with recommendations. See [here](#) for EU Synthesis report 2018 including links to national reports.

also the Parliament. In Ireland for example, the Better Europe Alliance, which was founded during the pilot project funded under EaSI and coordinated by EAPN in 2014, has currently 12 NGOs. They are invited to analyse the Country Report and discuss with Commission staff; to meet the fact-finding team in the winter coordinated through the ESO, and to attend on-going meetings with the Commission throughout the year. Significantly, in some countries there is an increased profile given to NGOs/Trusts and foundations, but in their role as researchers (RO).

This tends to underline that the **primary value placed on stakeholder engagement is their usefulness in providing statistical evidence** rather than their role in **connecting to people and signposting concrete examples and experience from the ground**.

### *Negative/Missing*

Most members highlight that the NRP is **little known nor visible** at national level amongst CSOs. As it is generally **drafted by the Ministries of Finance**, Social Ministries have a limited role (FI). Neither is there usually a specific concrete space for civil society engagement (AT, BE, FI, PT). Even in Ireland where social partner dialogue involves civil society and voluntary organisations, the Country Report noted the **limited consultative nature of engagement** with stakeholders in NRP. Where there is consultation it is often very formal and often involves a **limited amount of 'chosen' representative organisations**, e.g. in Latvia, the Confederate of Trade unions and the Civil Alliance are invited but not grassroots organisations. In Belgium, the opinions of high-level formal representative bodies are attached to NRPs. Similarly, in France with the Social Council. Alternatively, engagement is carried out through **one-off meetings** or panel discussions rather than regular dialogue (LT).

In some cases, social NGOs are engaged in **parallel structures which have no formal inputs** into the NRP or the Semester (BE, FI). In Finland, EAPN is involved in the Sub-Committee EU25 Social Affairs which is only able to comment on the NRP after it is adopted. In Belgium, BAPN engages with the Belgian Platform against Poverty, but it has no clear role in the NRP. In some cases, there has been some **backtracking on structured dialogue mechanisms with social NGOs, many of which were initially built with reference to the Social OMC** (e.g. LU and UK). For example, in Luxembourg, the Social Inclusion Group included several Ministries, municipalities, social partners and CSOs but was ditched in 2014.

This **underlines the lack of clarity or commitment to the role of civil society (AT, BE, FI) in the national part of the Semester**, lacking rigorous mechanisms for effective and regular dialogue. The Commission has a key role to play in this. In Austria, a very clear example was given where NGOs were invited to a kick-off meeting, but when approached about developing more real participation, the coordinator was sceptical of the usefulness, because the National Council would veto any inputs and erase any potentially critical content (AT). **There is also confusion surrounding the role of Civil Society organisations** who are increasingly expected to provide high level 'scientific' research, rather than supporting **direct dialogue between decision-makers with people with direct experience of poverty** and exclusion to signpost what works/doesn't work and build credible solutions. In the worst cases, NGOs that are critical are **explicitly excluded** from any debate (HU). This is made worse by the fact that the processes are not transparent (HU).

Members were clear that the **Commission had a clear role to enable a level playing field** for civil society engagement: 1) providing binding guidelines to ensure effective participation 2) providing dedicated resources to build capacity and support participation 3) promoting exchange on good practice 4) monitoring the incidence and effectiveness of engagement through the Country Report with the potential for CSRs (See Sections 4 and 5 for more details).

## 2. Overall Assessment of impact of the Semester on Poverty, Social Rights and Participation

### SUMMARY SCOREBOARD

Statements	
95.45%	1. The European Semester is primarily aimed at macroeconomic and financial coordination not Europe 2020 targets or Social Pillar (50% strongly agree + 45.45% partly agree)
63.64%	2. Austerity is still the dominant macroeconomic focus, and continues to generate more poverty and social exclusion (22.73% strongly agree + 40.91% partly agree)
18.18%	3. Inequality is a priority, encouraging redistribution, including fairer tax (0.00% strongly agree + 18.18% partly agree)
27.28%	4. The poverty target and poverty reduction are a clear priority (4.55% strongly agree + 22.73% partly agree)
50.00%	5. There is more focus on positive social investment in services, e.g. education, health, housing (9.09% strongly agree + 40.91% partly agree)
13.64%	6. Progress has been made in tackling homelessness and housing exclusion (0.00% strongly agree + 13.64% partly agree)
68.18%	7. Employment is proposed as the main route out of poverty, including increased conditionality (36.36% strongly agree + 31.82% partly agree)
23.81%	8. Increasing quality jobs and tackling in-work poverty is a key priority in the NRP (4.76% strongly agree + 19.05% partly agree)
9.09%	9. A person-centred, integrated approach to supporting people into quality jobs is increasingly proposed (0.00% strongly agree + 9.09% partly agree)
13.64%	10. An integrated strategy on poverty, supporting active inclusion – access to quality jobs, services and adequate minimum income – is supported (4.55% strongly agree + 9.09% partly agree)
36.37%	11. Progress has been made on implementing key EU priorities – particularly child poverty and investing in children (13.64% strongly agree + 22.73% partly agree)
31.82%	12. The Social Pillar and concerns about increasing social rights and standards are more visible (0.00% strongly agree + 31.82% partly agree)
50.00%	13. Education and training measures are primarily aimed at increasing skills not at ensuring an inclusive quality education/life-long learning (18.18% strongly agree + 31.82% partly agree)
27.27%	14. Social Protection is seen as an investment, not a cost, and effectively impacts on poverty (9.09% strongly agree + 18.18% partly agree)
9.09%	15. Structural Funds are used effectively to reduce poverty and deliver on 20% of ESF (0.00% strongly agree + 9.09% partly agree)
45.46%	16. EAPN members engaged and/or were consulted in the development of the Semester (13.64% strongly agree + 31.82% partly agree)
13.64%	17. The opinion of anti-poverty NGOs was taken seriously into account in the NRPs (9.09% strongly agree + 4.55% partly agree)

## Summary

Overall, EAPN members still feel that the European Semester is **primarily aimed at macroeconomic and financial coordination** rather than achieving Europe 2020 goals and targets or the Social Pillar (95.45%). A majority see austerity as still the dominant focus generating more poverty (63.64%). **Disappointingly, the poverty target is not seen as a clear priority (27.28%) nor the Social Pillar (31.82%)**. Even less so inequality, encouraging fairer distribution, including fairer tax (18.88%). **More positively**, 50% see more focus on **social investment** in services (health, housing, education). However, **social protection is still not seen sufficiently as an investment**, only a cost (27.27%). Insufficient progress has also been made on **implementing some key EU priorities** particularly child poverty and Investing in Children (36.37%) and tackling homelessness and housing exclusion (13.64%).

In terms of other key policy areas, **employment is still proposed as the main route out of poverty** with increased negative conditionality (68.18%), with only 33.33% seeing **quality jobs and tackling in-work poverty** as a key priority (23.81%). Even fewer see a **person-centred integrated approach** to supporting people into quality jobs (9.09%) or through an **integrated active inclusion** strategy to fight poverty, based on access to quality jobs, services and adequate minimum income (13.64%). Whilst **half see some progress away from a narrow employment focus for education and training** primarily aimed at increasing skills, rather than as a social right to inclusive education and lifelong learning (50%). Less than 10% see the **Structural Funds being used effectively to reduce poverty** through integrated active inclusion and deliver on the 20% of ESF earmarked for poverty reduction.

As regards **participation**, nearly half EAPN networks have engaged or were consulted (45.66%), but only 13.64% felt their opinions were taken seriously into account.

## National comments

- **Some members are more positive about the social impact of the Semester at EU level**, rather than national (LT, UK).
- **Poverty/social rights are a focus in CRs/CSRs but not at national level** (LT).
- There are **major gaps in actions on homelessness, quality and accessibility of social services and minimum income, as well as increasing progressivity of taxes** (LT).
- **Social investment** is still treated too often as a cost. There is little sign of a **national priority to provide social rights**, particularly for people experiencing poverty (HU).
- **Although some countries are developing anti-poverty strategies** (e.g. LT, ES) **the test is in the implementation**. Lithuania is developing a strategy for 2030 with tackling poverty and improving well-being among the aims. But the strategy is not confirmed.
- **Social innovation to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion is essential** but needs financial and other assistance, structures and incentives to support the third sector/social economy (MT).
- **Regarding the 20% ESF earmarking on poverty**, there is little detailed information. EAPN produced a barometer, but a transparent and effective process to monitor and evaluate the implementation, involving civil society, is missing (PT).

- **In terms of participation, NGOs critical voice is being suppressed.** In some Member States, anybody who is not in favour of Governments' policy is ignored. This undermines democracy and credibility as well as effective policy solutions (HU).

### 3. Specific assessment of key milestones / reports in the European Semester

This chapter summarises our members' views on the quality and effectiveness of the three main elements of the European Semester 2019, namely the Country Reports, the National Reform Programmes, and the Country-Specific Recommendations. EAPN has already prepared an [in-depth analysis of the Country Reports](#), complete with alternative Country-Specific Recommendations proposed by our members, as well as [a detailed assessment of the Country Specific Recommendations](#) proposed by the European Commission in June 2019.

The assessment of these key elements is somewhat mixed, indicating both **some promises in what concerns better social rights**, as well as some missed opportunities which continue to hinder the fight against poverty and social exclusion on the continent. While important differences between Member States persist, most have noted **improvements in what concerns poverty** being included more explicitly, in more detail, and in a more structured way, with more realistic information about the situation on the ground. There appears to be **a better balance between macroeconomic concerns and social priorities**.

That said, the analysis and proposals, both by the European Commission and Governments, **don't go far enough to ensure a real prioritisation of social rights** and an overall ambition to guarantee to curb poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, and to guarantee dignified lives for all. Concerns are raised about the fact that macroeconomic priorities are still dominant, while the **Europe 2020 targets are not as visible**, and the full 20 principles of the **European Pillar of Social Rights not fully and adequately mainstreamed in the documents**.

#### 3.1 Country Reports 2019

##### *Positive elements*

Most EAPN respondents report a **cautiously positive view** of the Country Reports 2019, pointing to **explicit references to poverty**, inequalities, and social exclusion (EE, IE, LT, LU, PT, ES), **improved in-depth analysis** of structural issues (HU, LT, ES), and the Reports being broader, **more comprehensive, and more balanced** (SE, UK), **more realistic**, with **better statistical data** (HU, RO), and overall more critical of government policy and the inadequacy of current policy approaches. EAPN prepared a [full analysis of Country Reports](#) in May 2019.

Our members particularly appreciate the attention paid in their Country Reports 2019 to the following key social issues:

- social security, adequacy of benefits (including minimum income) and their impact on poverty, complexity of the benefits system, distributional impact of tax reform (AT, FI, IE, LT, PL, PT)
- education, training, and lifelong learning (AT, FI, FR, LT, MT, PT)

- gender pay and pension gap, gender inequalities, poverty of older women (AT, NL, PL PT)
- access to quality employment and improving inclusive labour markets and in-work poverty (IE, PL, PT)
- housing (BE, MT, PT) and homelessness (CZ, IE)
- health, including access to healthcare services and health inequalities (AT, BE, PT)
- access to care services, including childcare, social care, long-term care (PL, PT)
- child poverty (FI, PT), with a focus on lone parents and numerous families (PT)
- social investment, including through Structural Funds (FI, ES)
- access to services and integrated provision (FI, IE)
- regional disparities in poverty rates, including differences between rural and urban (PL, PT)
- attention paid to vulnerable groups (BE), including integration of migrants (MT), people with disabilities (PL), older people and demographic challenges (PT)
- household debt (FI), material deprivation (PT), energy poverty (PT).

In Romania, members appreciate that the Report explicitly acknowledges that economic growth does not positively influence the situation of people at poverty risk. EAPN Finland welcomes that their Country Report echoes their concerns about inherent shortcomings of active labour market policies and public employment services, recognising that current approaches are not only not effective in getting people into work, but actually push them further away from the labour market. Our members in Poland highlight as positive the fact that investment in social services was properly recognised as important for social cohesion and high level of employment.

### *Negative/Missing*

While improvement is noted in most Country Reports, our members equally highlight a **number of concerns** about the analysis, in terms of negative interpretations, or missing dimensions. EAPN respondents feel that, overall, the **Country Reports are still more macroeconomic than social** (AT, BE, HU, RO, SE, UK), with only **brief chapters on social issues** (AT, BE, EE, NL, SE, UK), which are not critical enough of the unsustainability of the current economic model (HU, UK). Our Croatian members feel that it is very much a repeat of Reports in previous years.

The **absence of an integrated anti-poverty strategy** and a coordinated social policy approach, based also on qualitative analysis and direct input from people experiencing poverty, is flagged up by the vast majority of our members (BE, HR, CZ, FR, DE, IE, LT, NL, PT, ES, UK). A key concern is that the Reports provide an **incomplete, upbeat view**, which focuses on improvements while it glazes over remaining critical areas and indicators (BE, FI).

Sadly, many **Reports do not mainstream the Social Pillar** throughout, but only refer to the Scoreboard indicators (AT, BE, FI, PT, UK). The **Social Scoreboard is also criticised** as it doesn't adequately cover all Social Pillar principles, and benchmarks with EU averages, rather than ambitious objectives, which distorts the perspective (AT, BE, CZ, FI, IE, UK).

Other **main negative / missing elements highlighted by our respondents** include:

- Adequacy of social protection, including minimum income, is not accurately portrayed, calculations are flawed, consumption needs and purchasing power are not taken into account (CZ, FI, LT, MT, PL). EAPN PT underlines that adequate income support must be seen as an investment not a cost.
- Lack of attention to accessibility and affordability of social and other services, including housing, health, education, childcare (EE, HU, LT, PL, PT, UK).
- Even if some Reports mention housing, it is only addressed from a market and investment point of view, rather than a social perspective/impact (LU, PT, SE, UK).
- Lack of attention paid to key dimensions and groups: homelessness (MT, PT, PL), Roma, lack of gender mainstreaming (PT), people with disabilities (EE), large families, single-person households, the unemployed (LT), the elderly (MT), among others.
- Narrow interpretations and lack of comprehensive solutions for complex issues requiring a policy mix, such as child poverty (FI) or demographic challenges (PT).
- No explicit section on stakeholder involvement, which should also include civil society engagement (PT) and that of people with direct experience of poverty (BE).
- Misuse of the 'welfare dependency' argument to drive down benefits (PL).
- Lack of disaggregated poverty data/solutions to reduce rural/urban disparities (RO).
- Damaging incentives to curb social investment (FR).
- No criticism of public works scheme, or 'socially useful activities', which violate human rights (LT).
- The Report is still largely descriptive and features only some limited analysis of possible causes and consequences, while solutions are mainly not adequate (UK).
- Work life balance needs to be treated as an investment, through supporting care for children but also the elderly.

## 3.2 National Reform Programmes 2019

### *Positive elements*

Overall, most EAPN respondents found that the **National Reform Programmes 2019 give a stronger prominence to social concerns** compared to previous years. Some members recognize that the **Reports are more accurate**, offering clearer statistical data and analysis reflecting on progress, or lack thereof, on the poverty target and the fight against poverty and social exclusion (FI). Other respondents appreciate the **explicit commitments to the European Pillar of Social Rights** (PL, PT) as well as the pledge by the United Kingdom government to continue the Semester process, after the Brexit vote.

Some members highlight **increased attention paid to social issues and poverty** (HU, NL, UK) and praise successful Government efforts to reduce poverty in their countries (PL, RO). EAPN members welcome the featuring of Government strategies adopted in key areas, such as anti-poverty strategies and policies (NL, ES), the Portugal 2030 strategy (PT), child poverty strategies (UK – N Ireland, Scotland, Wales). A more self-critical approach by Governments is also praised (AT, BE).

Positive steps are noted in a number of countries in terms of **coverage and adequacy of social protection**. In Finland, there have been increases in minimum sickness insurance allowances and guaranteed pensions, as well as young people’s rehabilitation and vocational allowance. In Lithuania, the amount of universal child benefit was increased. In Sweden, the Government wants to continue to strengthen welfare, and it is noted that this contributes to good economic development. In the UK, there are efforts to improve benefit take-up (N Ireland).

**Quality of work and employment** is prioritised in Portugal, including through supporting transitions to permanent contracts, reinforcing job creation, paying social security contributions, and fostering better work-life balance. In Finland, unemployed persons aged over 25 may now study for up to six months without losing their unemployment benefits, and there are also different pilot programmes to develop employment services. The Maltese NRP highlights measures to support the employment of vulnerable groups and an increased participation of women in the labour market. In the UK, Scotland commits to building a “Living Wage nation”, while Wales takes measures to reduce in-work poverty.

**Access to housing** is given visibility in some NRPs (IE, PT, UK), but, in Ireland and the UK, measures to prevent people ending up in homelessness are deemed inadequate by our members. EAPN Finland welcomes the recognition that the risk of poverty of **non-EU migrants** is almost twice as high as that of the EU-born and praises that **early childhood education** tuition fees were lowered for low and middle-income families. In the Portuguese NRP, **minorities** are identified as one of the target groups for the promotion of digital skills. The Finnish and French NRPs highlight **gender inequalities**, as well as the creation of indicators to better capture these realities. Other issues mentioned in the NRPs that our members welcomed include **energy poverty** (PT), household **indebtedness** (FI), and combating **education and health inequalities** (UK – Wales).

Encouragingly, some members report that their concerns and input were explicitly reflected in the text (CZ, PL, ES), including an Annex of all stakeholder contributions to the Report (IE).

### *Negative/Missing*

Despite these very positive steps, our members identify a number of **shortcomings and missed opportunities** in the National Reform Programmes 2019.

The **limited attention paid to the social dimension** continues to be a concern in some countries (AT, EE, IE), while the focus continues to be on competitiveness and employment (EE, FI, RO, UK). In some countries, the NRP offers little new information and is superficial (EE, HU, LU). Some members (AT, BE, FR, PT, SE, UK) equally deplore the fact that **Europe 2020 targets or the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Social Scoreboard are either not mentioned at all, or not adequately mainstreamed** and analysed in the NRP. In Romania, implementation of the CSRs is not given proper weight in the report, despite poor implementation since 2013. Data is manipulated and selectively presented in the UK report, which also fails to respond to concerns raised by the Country Report.

**An integrated vision/strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion is missing**, in the opinion of many members (BE, HU, IE, LT, PT, RO, UK). Measures are piecemeal and not

ambitious enough, or even create more poverty (BE), with lack of clarity on implementation (RO). The Irish national anti-poverty strategy is long overdue. Even for proposed measures, there is a **lack of proper impact assessment and evaluation** in the NRPs, highlighted by many members (FI, IE, LT, PL, RO). For instance, in Romania, there is no analysis to demonstrate that the increased GDP and employment rate contribute to the wellbeing of vulnerable population, especially in the rural areas, or to the decrease of in-work poverty. Active Inclusion is mentioned in Ireland and Finland, but not mainstreamed.

Another prominent area of concern is the fact that the **inadequacy of the social protection system is not accurately reflected** (BE, LT, MT, PL, UK). In Lithuania, Croatia, and Poland more efforts are needed to improve social assistance. In Belgium, benefits are still low and most still far under the EU Poverty Threshold even if some were slightly increased. In the UK, Universal Credit is significantly less generous and has harsher non-compliance penalties, in addition to administrative problems in the roll-out and risks to privacy in data-sharing. However, none of these concerns are addressed in these countries' NRPs.

There is no focus on adequate income in Malta. Worryingly, the **impact of cuts in public spending is not fully taken on board** by some NRPs (FI, FR, ES, UK). Despite increases in some social benefits in Finland, austerity cuts have impacted both social protection, such as the freezing of the national pension index, as well as services, such as vocational training. In France, there were cuts in the social housing sector.

Despite significant evidence from the ground, measures for **housing inclusion and tackling homelessness are strikingly missing** in a number of countries (CZ, LT, LU, MT, PL). Other missing dimensions highlighted by our members include improving the quality and accessibility of social services (LT), supporting inclusive education (CZ), promoting quality employment (UK), increasing the minimum wage (NL), and reducing regional disparities (HU).

Some countries (AT, NL, PT) would like to see **more visibility of the process of civil society engagement in the drafting of the NRPs** in the reports. Others (DE, PT) highlight that the **efficiency of EU funds**, including the monitoring of 20% of ESF marked for poverty-reduction, could be much better monitored in the NRPs. Our French and Spanish members point to the fact that political instability in their countries might have affected the quality of the NRP.

### 3.3 Country-Specific Recommendations 2019

#### *Positive elements*

In our members' assessment, there are **a number of positive elements** in the Country-Specific Recommendations in 2019. For example, some countries (HR, EE, LT) note that **more space is dedicated to social issues**, including highlighting poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. However, other countries (AT, RO) deplore that **most of the socially relevant content is confined to the Preamble**, rather than having made its way into the Recommendations themselves. The relative vagueness of the CSRs is highlighted by our Swedish members, who

feel that, while relevant issues are mentioned, they are not necessarily viewed from an anti-poverty perspective. You can also read EAPN's full assessment of the CSRs 2019 [here](#).

A number of countries (EE, FI, PT, RO, ES) welcome references to the **adequacy, coverage, and effectiveness of social protection**. Adequacy and coverage are highlighted in Estonia and Portugal while the complexity of the benefits system is highlighted in Finland, together with a recommendation to tackle household indebtedness. Improvement and implementation of **adequate minimum income schemes** is explicitly mentioned in Romania and Spain, which is very positive.

Many countries received positive recommendations in the area of **quality of work and employment** (BE, CZ, EE, FI, FR, IE, NL). There is also a focus on access to the labour market for **key groups**, such as women (CZ, FI), migrants and refugees (BE, FI, FR), the low-skilled (BE, FI), older workers (BE), people with disabilities (FI) with **personalised active integration support** highlighted for Ireland and Finland. Some of our members (EE, NL) appreciate the positive references to **wage adequacy**, for example by increasing transparency and tackling the gender pay gap in Estonia or supporting wage growth in the Netherlands. In the latter, promoting adequate social protection for the self-employed is another welcome element.

Increasing access to **quality and affordable services** is present in a number of CSRs, which is another element appreciated by our members (BE, EE, FI, IE, LT, RO). **Integrated services** are also mentioned in a number of CSRs (EE, FI, RO). A significant number of CSRs focus on **better education systems** (BE, DE, LT, RO), highlighting issues such as quality (LT, RO), inclusiveness (BE, RO), adult learning (LT), focus on disadvantaged groups such as the Roma (RO), digital skills (RO). In Finland, **better access to social and healthcare** services is urged, which is very welcome considering the high rate of self-declared unmet medical needs. References to increasing **access to affordable quality childcare and long-term care** (IE, PL) are important, however it should not be seen only in the context of labour market participation. **Energy poverty is mentioned in Poland and sustainability** in Finland including on sustainable transport (FI and DE). Investment in **affordable and social housing** is welcome in Ireland and Germany.

Some CSRs (DE, IE, LT, RO, UK) contain positive references to **social and sustainable investment**, including its role in countering regional disparities (DE).

Broadening the tax base is welcome in Ireland and Lithuania, as well as calls for sustainable investment in Romania. However, the UK points out that, while a focus on investment is needed, it should not lead to further austerity and cuts, as it has often done so far.

### *Negative/Missing*

Our members equally highlight **regrettably missing or even negative elements** in this year's CSRs, which can jeopardise progress on social rights, and even undermine the positive elements reported above. Doubts are raised by some of our members (AT, HU, RO) about the efficiency of the Semester, given that **Governments seem to ignore the recommendations without consequences for their non-implementation**, which leads to repeated CSRs year after year. Respondents in Hungary and the Netherlands stress that more systemic issues,

such as rise of populism, democratic decline, and shrinking social participation, are not factored in.

The most salient element highlighted by respondents (BE, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, PT, RO, ES, SE, UK) is that **poverty is missing**, sometimes even in Recommendations purporting to be 'poverty' ones. High poverty levels are not reflected, and there is a worrying lack of calls for rights-based, integrated anti-poverty strategies and policies, based on an Active Inclusion approach. Some member (FI, ES, UK) would equally like to see **clear references to achieving the Europe 2020 poverty targets** in the CSRs, while others (PL, PT) call for more **concrete links to Social Pillar principles**.

Many members (BE, CZ, EE, FI, FR, RO, ES) point out that **undue focus placed on macroeconomic sustainability undermines social rights**, and reverses incentives to social investment. While reducing expenditure is stressed, **not enough attention is paid to increasing public resources**, through acknowledging the impact of the tax/benefits system on reducing poverty and inequality (CZ, FI, LT, RO). Calls to reduce public spending undermine adequacy of long-term care and pension system in Belgium and France, and lead to **cuts in welfare** in the Czech Republic. Even Estonia, who has the lowest public debt in the EU, is urged to implement further adjustments.

In the same context, many members (CZ, FI, DE, IE, LT, PL) feel that **strong social protection and social security systems are not prioritised**, or inaccurately addressed. In Finland and Poland, social and family benefits are regarded as disincentives to work, rather than promoting a rights-based approach to sufficient income for a life in dignity. For instance, **adequacy of the welfare system** to cover real living costs is not mentioned in a number of countries (CZ, DE, FI, IE, LT).

Further concerns are raised by many respondents (AT, BE, LU, MT, PT, RO, UK) that **employment at any costs is still the dominant ideology**, as reflected in the CSRs. The **low level of wages** is highlighted (AT, LU, MT, RO, UK), with damaging references undermining wage references in Romania, and no mention of in-work poverty (LU, MT, RO, UK). While Austria has one of the highest **gender pay** gaps in Europe and this is clearly acknowledged in the Preamble, there is no recommendation to that effect. Regarding access to the labour market, some members (BE, PT, RO) would like to see **strengthened, targeted, positive activation policies focusing on supporting those furthest away from the labour market**. Instead, only upskilling is prioritised in Portugal, while the language in the Belgian recommendation could even encourage punitive activation measures, such as sanctions.

Another significant concern raised by respondents (EE, DE, LU, MT, NL, SE) concerns **inadequate responses to the growing housing crisis**. This is often addressed only from a market and investment point of view (LU, NL, SE), whereas **what is needed is a focus on affordability, housing subsidies, and increasing social housing** (FI, DE, MT, NL). In Estonia and Malta, housing is not even mentioned in the recommendations, despite a worsening situation on the ground, with increasing costs pushing many households into unsustainable debt.

Some members (AT, PT, RO) would like to see **more support to education and training**, particularly for those with a migrant background (AT), Roma and other disadvantaged pupils (PT), as well as stepped-up investment in the sector as a whole (RO). In Romania and Hungary,

there is a **missing focus on regional disparities in quality and access to services**. In Malta and Romania, **calls to ensure pension sustainability can be very damaging**, as they don't take into account pension adequacy and prioritise delaying retirement and encouraging Pillar 2-type pensions.

## 4. Progress on Participation

This chapter captures members' responses to **progress on participation of people experiencing poverty and their NGOs** in the European Semester process in 2019. We present below stakeholder engagement at the national and the European level - engaging with national governments and Parliaments, as well as the European Commission, assessing the quality of their involvement and pointing out areas where improvement is still needed to ensure meaningful, high-quality participation.

In total, 22 EAPN national networks replied to 17 closed questions. See the full Scoreboard at the end of the chapter.

### 4.1 Engagement with national governments

Overall, **73.73% of respondents** (16 national networks) to the EAPN Survey **have engaged in some way in the 2019 European Semester process at the national level** (AT, BE, BG, CZ, FI, FR, IE, LV, LT, MT, NL, PT, RO, ES, SE). EAPN networks which appear to be the most involved are Ireland, Poland and Spain. While the least involved are Estonia, Hungary, Luxembourg and the UK. These networks often appear disillusioned by the lack of political will for an effective participatory governance. To a lesser extent, also Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany and Portugal struggle to be included.

**EAPN LUXEMBOURG** – *Since 2014 there is no more engagement!*

**EAPN HUNGARY** – *The Semester is not an issue in Hungary in public debates or in the field of fight against poverty. As our country is facing a serious democratic decline, our day-to-day challenges we have to tackle are far from the world or myth of the Semester. It is not an appropriate framework in the case of Hungary to transform values, recommendations, etc... of the EU into government policies. It maybe works on paper but not in the real decision-making processes. The result - Hungary "could manage" to be one of the poorest countries of the EU within some years.*

**EAPN UK** – *There is no UK opportunity for NGOs to engage with the European Semester at national level. Both UK Government and the Scottish Government prepared an NRP. The UK Government stated as usual, that since 'the NRP does not contain any new policy announcements, it is not subject to formal consultation' (section 1.19). Stakeholder engagement is translating policies into concrete outcomes (section 1.21). Scottish Government did not invite Poverty Alliance to any NRP consultation, and they are not aware that any was held. The Poverty Alliance does engage with Scottish Government in consultation, policy lobbying and policy delivery, but in the national context.*

***Some improvements but most social NGOs struggle to participate in a structured, transparent and inclusive way***

From our members' assessment, there are some positive improvements in the **quality of engagement in 2019 in half the countries** (AT, BE, FI, FR, LV, LT, MT, RO, ES, SE). Compared to the past, contact with national Governments on the Semester was partly improved in 40.91% of cases (AT, FI, FR, DE, LV, LT, PL, RO, ES) a figure which bodes well for the future. In the case of Poland, improvements were significant. Ireland pointed out that although they have a positive engagement, there have been no specific changes or improvement.

**Concerning the NRP, gradual improvements can be noticed.** 15 countries out of 22 (68.18%) reported that their national Government did not consult them on it (AT, BE, HR, CZ, EE, FI, DE, HU, LV, LT, LU, PT, RO, SE, UK), however seven networks experienced partial (BG, FR, IE, MT) or even full involvement (PL, ES). 15 countries highlighted that they were not asked to comment on a draft text. However, 7 members were to some extent (BG, FR, IE, MT) with NL, PL, ES considerably. 6 of EAPN respondents (27.27%) were actively invited to a meeting to discuss the NRPs (AT, BG, FR, MT, PL, ES). In ten cases, EAPN members provided direct input to the NRPs (AT, BG, HR, FI, FR, IE, NL, PL, RO, SE). However, only in four cases, was their input taken on board, and then just moderately (FR, IE, PL, ES).

The prevalent concern that emerges is that **national governments are not acting in a way to guarantee a structured, inclusive and transparent policy-making** process. Disappointingly, most networks feel that even when their presence is accepted at the discussion tables, **either there is no real space for meaningful consultation, or the final result does not seriously take into account their contribution.** For example, EAPN Ireland states that the ongoing engagement process at the national level is very limited, not putting in place a holistic participatory approach and not contemplating face-to-face exchange.

**EAPN AUSTRIA** – *EAPN AT was invited to the "kick off meeting" for the NRP, as mentioned before. This meeting is not to participate, in the way that we understand participation.*

**EAPN BELGIUM** - *Since 2016, we find attached to the National Reform Programme the opinions of the Central Economic Council, the National Labour Council, the National High Council for the Disabled and the Federal Council for Sustainable Development. In Belgium the NRP includes the summary of different Regional Reform Programmes. The NRP states that stakeholders also were involved with their development. We as the Belgian anti-poverty network, nor our regional members were not involved. We are not aware of other anti-poverty organisations involvement. We did present our analysis of the main Semester documents for Belgium at the Belgium Government Platform EU 2020 against Poverty and Social Exclusion. We believe it is important to continue raising awareness on the Semester to Belgian stakeholders, among which the civil servants involved in drafting the NRP.*

**EAPN IRELAND** – *Our engagement with the national Government on the Semester is via email, with no face-to-face engagement and no clear indication that our input is taken account of. The Department of Taoiseach, which coordinates the process in Ireland, however highlights in the NRP that engagement is ongoing with different Departments and is not just about the formal process of drafting of the NRP. In that sense we have engagement with other Departments, particularly the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection which oversees Government policy on poverty reduction. However, this does not allow for a holistic engagement on the semester at national level involving all*

stakeholders. Any engagement of this type is carried out by the Commission with little Government input. The Government does hold a 1.5-day National Economic Dialogue with a range of stakeholders including civil society, but this focuses specifically on the annual budget process. Since 2018 the NRP also includes an appendix outlining the proposals from all the submissions made in the process.

**EAPN LATVIA** – EAPN Latvia is represented as a full member in the Coordination Committee for Social Inclusion Policies at the Ministry of Welfare, where the relevant chapters of the NRP were discussed, though the Committee is only an advisory body.

**EAPN NETHERLANDS** – We were asked to comment on the NRP by the Government.

**EAPN POLAND** - Poland has a long-standing Inter-ministerial Task Force on Europe 2020, which EAPN participates in. However, EAPN members have to continually forge a new role for themselves by organising their input/evidence, e.g. in Poland EAPN presented the Poverty Watch at the meeting on a par with the Ministry and Statistics Poland.

**EAPN SPAIN** – We have a regular dialogue with the Government. We made detailed input and some of our proposals were taken on board in the NRP.

**EAPN SWEDEN** – We have distributed our Poverty Watch to the Ministry, as well as the European Semester Officers. We have also sent our reactions regarding the Swedish NRP to the relevant Department. The only ones who answered and thanked us were the Government Offices. However, there was no satisfactory explanation as to why the poverty statistics were removed.

## 4.2 Engagement with the European Commission

Most EAPN members have increasing engagement with the European Commission through the European Semester: by providing input and responding to the Country Reports and Country-Specific Recommendations. This engagement takes places both at national level with the European Semester Officers and at EU level with the Commission Desk Officers, independent experts and through participation in EU-level dialogue meetings.

***Moving in the right direction towards a meaningful civil dialogue, but resources are still key***

On a very positive note, **the vast majority of EAPN respondents (72.73%) affirm that they have had contact with their European Semester Officer** (AT, BE, BG, FI, FR, DE, IE, LV, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, ES, SE) and in 31.82% of the cases, contact with them has improved (AT, BE, FI, LV, LT, PT, ES). Moreover, 40.91% of networks involved in the Survey have organised meetings in their Commission representation (AT, BE, HR, FI, IE, LV, MT, PL, ES). At the EU level, about half of national networks (54.55%) have contact with the Commission Desk Officers for their country (AT, BE, FI, HU, IE, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, ES) and for 31.82% of respondents improvements were noticed in their partnership (AT, BE, LT, LU, MT, PT, ES).

When it comes to the policy impact, there is a significant difference between impact achieved with the national and EU level. **In relation to the Country Reports, 59.09% say that they have**

**provided input** (AT, BE, BG, CZ, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, MT, NL, PL, ES), i.e. by sending their national Poverty Watch or by email. **Encouragingly, 55% highlighted that their concerns were reflected in the Country Reports** (AT, BE, CZ, EE, FI, FR, IE, LT, MT, PL, ES). Over 2/3 of EAPN networks (**66.66%**) **affirmed that they saw their concerns reflected in the CSRs** (AT, HR, CZ, EE, FI, FR, IE, LV, LT, PL, PT, RO, ES, UK). In this regard, the impact of anti-poverty organisations in the European Semester process seems to be rather successful.

Several members underline fruitful **face-to-face collaboration** with the European Commission and European Parliament at national level (BE, HR, FI, IE, LT, PT, RO, ES). For instance, EAPN Finland organised, together with the European Commission Representation and the ESO, a training session with a focus on the functioning of the European Semester and a hearing event on the Country Report. EAPN Croatia mentioned a good public discussion on the Semester that it organised with potential MEPs before the European Parliament elections. EAPN Romania cited a successful meeting held in Brussels, organised by EAPN Europe and the Romanian Permanent Representation with their European Semester Officer, European Commission and representatives from other permanent representations.

**EAPN AUSTRIA** – *EAPN Austria had contact with the Semester Officer and the coordinator of the NRP, which is a first step towards more participation. Anyway, participation in the European Semester needs more resources to be provided if civil society is to participate with high quality!*

**EAPN BELGIUM** – *Last year we sent our Poverty Watch to the Desk Officer for Belgium by email and arranged a meeting with him. At this meeting we presented our key recommendations. Our (social) housing concern was reflected in the Country Report and we were encouraged by the Desk Officer to provide updates and information that may be of use for them. This year we sent him our comments on the Country Report by email and hope to have a meeting with him again in the Fall (when the Country Desks start drafting the Country Report for 2020).*

**EAPN FINLAND** – *We made a Poverty Watch and circulated it widely to different stakeholders in Finland and also to our Semester Officer and Desk Officer. Last Autumn together with SOSTE<sup>8</sup> we had a training and hearing event for NGOs with the Commission's delegation. We sent also afterwards different materials to our Desk Officer and Semester Officer. In the CR there are some issues we have pointed out. We wrote blog posts about the theme and made alternative CSRs with SOSTE and circulated them widely to different stakeholders. On a press release with SOSTE we commented on Finland's poverty reduction target and introduced our alternative recommendations.*

**EAPN IRELAND** – *We have always engaged actively with the Semester and have a positive relationship with the ESO. Our engagement with the European Commission on the European Semester is stronger than with the national Government. This has been the case for a number of years. The engagement with the Commission is face to face and includes a sense*

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<sup>8</sup> SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social and Health is an umbrella organisation for NGOs and a member of EAPN Finland.

*of them wanting to be seen to listen and take on board our issues. This is mainly through the Better Europe Alliance, which is co-ordinated by EAPN Ireland.*

**EAPN PORTUGAL** – *At the European level we have been involved in some relevant meetings/stakeholder dialogues with the Commission in Brussels and we have felt that these moments were important to present some of our concerns and proposals.*

On the other side, some members highlight **shortfalls** in their relations (AT, BE, SE, UK). The Semester Officers are still **primarily ‘economic’ officers and focussed on proposals that contribute to growth and macroeconomic** priorities. For example, EAPN Belgium although pleased with the positive response from the ESO regarding social housing highlighted that he showed “*some reluctance to integrate other of our concerns. We felt that for the Semester Officer economic issues stayed predominant. Also, the recommendations coming from people in poverty were not considered scientific enough to be included in the report*”. EAPN Sweden pointed out that although they have circulated their Poverty Watch to their ESO and to relevant members and candidates of the European Parliament, they never received any reply. EAPN UK contacted the Commission’s representation to ask for their participation at the 2018 EMIN<sup>9</sup> national Conference but they refused to join in because of the Brexit context.

EAPN Finland, although they have consolidated this year their relationship with their European Semester and Desk Officers that allows them to share information and analyses, highlighted that the Commission has a much **more optimistic view** concerning the poverty target compared to theirs. EAPN Austria also reminded us that civil dialogue **needs funds and resources** in order for civil society organisations and people facing poverty to fully engage in the policy-making process.

Finally, in terms of **cross-sectoral work and alliance building, positively**, almost three-quarters of members (**72.73%**) **work together with other NGOs or other sectors** to engage in the European Semester process (only BE, DE, LT, LU, SE and the UK do not), confirming the importance of working in a cross-sectional way, together with multiple stakeholders.

The Commission’s **innovative funding line to support EU Alliances in 2014** helped to initiate this example by financing **pilot cross-sectoral alliances** through its project with the European Semester Alliance, coordinated by EAPN. EAPN Ireland’s Better Europe Alliance was launched through this process. However, the funding line was discontinued after a year. Providing new funding for this kind of work, could provide a crucial boost to more effective engagement for social and other NGOs and stakeholders in the Semester at national level.

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<sup>9</sup> European Minimum Income Network (EMIN) coordinated by EAPN. See [here](#)

## SUMMARY SCOREBOARD

### Progress on participation of people experiencing poverty and their NGOs in the European Semester in 2019

72.73%	1. Do you engage in the European Semester at national level? (14% strongly agree + 59% partly agree)
50%	2. Has your engagement increased in 2019? (5% strongly agree + 45% partly agree)
31.82%	3. Does your national government consult you on the NRP? (9% strongly agree + 23% partly agree)
31.82%	4. Are you asked to comment on a draft of the NRP? (14% strongly agree + 18% partly agree)
27.27%	5. Were you invited to a meeting to discuss the NRP? (9% strongly agree + 18% partly agree)
45.45%	6. Did your organisation provide input to the NRP? (18% strongly agree + 27% partly agree)
18.18%	7. Was your input taken on board? (0% strongly agree + 18% partly agree)
40.91%	8. Has your contact/engagement with your national government on the Semester improved compared to the past? (0% strongly agree + 41% partly agree)
72.73%	9. Do you have contact with the European Semester Officer? (14% strongly agree + 59% partly agree)
31.82%	10. Has your contact with them improved? (9% strongly agree + 23% partly agree)
40.91%	11. Have you organised meetings in the Commission representation? (5% strongly agree + 36% partly agree)
54.55%	12. Do you have contact with the Commission Desk Officers for your country? (5% strongly agree + 50% partly agree)
31.82%	13. Has your contact with them improved? (0% strongly agree + 32% partly agree)
59.09%	14. Did you provide input to the Country Reports, i.e. by Poverty Watch or email? (23% strongly agree + 36% partly agree)
55%	15. Were your concerns reflected in the Country Reports? (10% strongly agree + 45% partly agree)
66.66%	16. Were your concerns reflected in the CSRs? (10% strongly agree + 57% partly agree)
72.73%	17. Do you work together with other NGOs or other sectors to engage in the European Semester? (23% strongly agree + 50% partly agree)

## DETAILED SCOREBOARD

QUESTIONS	A LOT	SOME	NOT AT ALL	NOT SURE OR DON'T KNOW
1. Do you engage in the European Semester at national level?	13.64%	59.09%	27.27%	0.00%
2. Has your engagement increased in 2019?	4.55%	45.45%	45.45%	4.55%
3. Does your national government consult you on the NRP?	9.09%	22.73%	68.18%	0.00%
4. Are you asked to comment on a draft of the NRP?	13.64%	18.18%	68.18%	0.00%
5. Were you invited to a meeting to discuss the NRP?	9.09%	18.18%	63.64%	9.09%
6. Did your organisation provide input to the NRP?	18.18%	27.27%	54.55%	0.00%
7. Was your input taken on board?	0.00%	18.18%	77.27%	4.55%
8. Has your contact/engagement with your national government on the Semester improved compared to the past?	0.00%	40.91%	50.00%	9.09%
9. Do you have contact with the European Semester Officer?	13.64%	59.09%	22.73%	4.55%
10. Has your contact with them improved?	9.09%	22.73%	54.55%	13.64%
11. Have you organised meetings in the Commission representation?	4.55%	36.36%	59.09%	0.00%
12. Do you have contact with the Commission Desk Officers for your country?	4.55%	50.00%	45.45%	0.00%
13. Has your contact with them improved?	0.00%	31.82%	63.64%	4.55%
14. Did you provide input to the Country Reports, i.e. by Poverty Watch or email?	22.73%	36.36%	40.91%	0.00%
15. Were your concerns reflected in the Country Reports?	10.00%	45.00%	45.00%	0.00%
16. Were your concerns reflected in the CSRs?	9.52%	57.14%	33.33%	0.00%
17. Do you work together with other NGOs or other sectors to engage in the European Semester?	22.73%	50.00%	27.27%	0.00%

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Is it worth engaging in the Semester?

Despite the challenges, EAPN members said they are **overwhelmingly in favour of engaging in the European Semester**. **81.82% said that they thought engaging in the European Semester was worth the effort** (31.82% - yes, definitely and 50% - yes).

#### *Why it's worth it*

Members are clear that the **European Semester is the main EU instrument for achieving progress on social rights** and equality at national and EU level (BE, FR). It also gives a better overview of those experiencing poverty and exclusion and helps to **keep poverty and anti-poverty issues on the agenda** (BE, MT, SE). In some cases, the Semester has supported key national social improvements, e.g. work-life balance, early childhood education, youth guarantee implementation (FR). Although it may not be working perfectly, it is recognised that a **well-designed policy, NRP and CSR, Country report could make all difference** (LU).

Other members **highlight the usefulness of the Semester to influence national policy**. All national policies are reflected (PT), so the **analysis of the Semester can be an entry point to highlight members key concerns** regarding national policies (BE, CZ, IE, LT, NL, PT, SE, ES). EAPN networks/organisations can do this by using supportive analysis, making proposals and recommendations as leverage on national policy (IE). Members can use key elements in their national advocacy, **referring to CR and CSR** (LT). They can also use it to **lobby for their own key proposals**, e.g. an integrated anti-poverty strategy (PT).

Finally, it offers a key opportunity to **engage in dialogue with national decisionmakers** (AT, BE, PL, PT). This can be an added value for EAPN networks as few other national organisations have this capacity (PT). In the best cases, members can become delegates or official representatives, as in Poland where they are part of an official Task Force for implementing Europe 2020: *“Being inside is much better for making impact than outside!”* (EAPN PL). In other countries, where civil society dialogue space is being closed down, it can offer the **only possibility of participation at national level** (AT).

#### *What's missing*

Despite the continued monitoring of the Europe 2020 Poverty Target and poverty indicators (AROPE) in the social scoreboard, **poverty reduction is not seen as a priority goal** (DE). As a result, progress on poverty is far too limited and does not achieve the attention it deserves in the Semester (BE, DE). It is vital to convince decisionmakers that **an equal society without poverty is not only necessary but also possible** (BE). It is also problematic when the **Semester is seen as responsible for promoting negative macroeconomic policies** rather than social rights (FR). The Semester needs to more visibly promote **a better balance of social /economic/environmental policies to promote** a decent + sustainable future for everyone (IE).

Doubts are also raised about **the Semester's impact on national policy** (EE, FR, IE, PL). Some felt that impact is limited by the **nature of the process**, i.e. the NRP is just a report on what the government decided to do in other national processes (PL). Others highlighted the **low visibility** at national level, being too much the concern of **senior officials** in the ministries (EE). **Engagement by NGOs must however be proportional to the policy impact** – if networks/members want impact on national level policy they must balance their engagement with other internal national policy process (EE, IE). Others highlighted the importance of **civil society's being pro-active**: *“monitoring the milestone reports, explaining our position and communicating publicly about the Semester, if we want to see some results”* (LT).

**In general, national governments are failing to engage effectively with civil society organisations** in the Semester (AT, FR, LT, PT, UK). Several members highlight that dialogue has improved more at European level with the European Commission than national level (AT, PT, UK). **Social partners** also continue to be the main national stakeholders with little room for dialogue with civil society (PT). Some members also recognise **limitations in their own capacity and effort** (LV). Overall what is missing is an **extended regular dialogue** with civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty (AT, EE, FR, IE, LT, PT, UK). In some countries this **existed more strongly previously**, i.e. under the Social OMC (2000-2010). For example, in UK the National Action Plans were carried out through a formal Task Force and quarterly consultation meetings with government officials including Ministers. A **comprehensive design of a structured dialogue process is needed** with obligatory guidelines to facilitate civil society engagement. Civil dialogue forums can be the first step in right direction (AT).

## 5.2 What proposals for improving meaningful participation?

### *Internal to EAPN*

Several members highlighted the urgent need to **increase capacity of EAPN members and grassroots organisations in the Semester** (AT, DE, LV, NL). For example, by starting a national **Semester Group** involving at least 2 People facing poverty and regular face to face meetings, explaining technical language (AT) and having regular **capacity building workshops** learning to participate better (DE). These could build to **organised discussions involving people experiencing poverty** on NRPs/CSRs, inviting national politicians (NL).

Others underline the importance of building the relationship/**regular dialogue with European Semester Officers** (BE, ES, IE, LT, RO). These could be particularly useful to provide input during the drafting of the Country Report and the CSRs (LT). Involving **people experiencing poverty** directly is essential (BE, NL). Members should continue to try to **engage in national task forces/government consultation** structures connected to the Semester and try to have more impact (BE, PL, ES). At the EU level, EAPN Europe should continue to attempt to **influence the overall approach** on the Semester, participating in meetings with new leadership of the European Commission, Council and Parliament (ES).

### *European Commission*

Overall, members are clear that it is the European Commission's responsibility to **make the Semester more social and rights-based by designing it within the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights** (PL). The Semester and its processes need to be **better known** at national level (EE, FI, LT, PT). This means agreeing **a transparent procedure and communicating it in a simple and clear way** that is accessible to citizens, even the most vulnerable (AT, PT). The Commission needs to **require/make obligatory the formal participation of CSOs and reporting** by Governments in the NRP (EE, LU). It must also put **stronger pressure on Member States** who are ignoring or attacking civil society (HU). Overall, there needs to be a recognition that a **'different kind of engagement** is necessary' if grassroots actors are to be effectively involved with more direct discussion on policy which impacts on people's lives and communities (AT, IE, PT).

Some of the **key elements** of this procedure should include:

- Defining **clear, compulsory guidelines for quality engagement** to national governments on how to involve Civil Society and **monitor** this process actively through the NRP/Country Reports (PT, UK).
- **Paying attention to the technical language** of the reports or providing more accessible summaries with capacity building (AT).
- Define **specific platforms for dialogue with Civil Society**, in parallel with social partners, not just to present information/listen but to gather information, evidence, etc. (PT).
- Require that views of Civil Society are **annexed to the NRP** and mainstreamed (BE).
- Support and reinforce the **European Meetings of People experiencing Poverty** and use them as good practice for Member State engagement at national level (PT).

- Enhance the **exchange of good practices on quality engagement** and key thematic social rights priorities between MS (benchmarking) and with peer reviews involving civil society organisations (PT).
- Ensure **specific, adequate financial support** for the participation of NGOs and people experiencing poverty in the Semester in dialogue at national level (PL, PT).
- Have **regular meetings between Social NGOs and different DGs/Directors in the European Semester** to discuss overarching Semester concerns from a national perspective involving national NGOs who are engaging in the Semester, whilst **valuing European NGOs** as valuable interlocutors with the national level (UK).
- Organise **joint meetings with Desk Officers** from different countries, other EC officials and representatives (BE).
- Engage **NGOs and people with direct experience of poverty in bilateral meetings** between the Commission and Member States (IE, PT).

### *National Governments*

Members highlight the **urgent need for improvements in the process at national level**. They urge that **small steps** could be taken with minimum effort and resources:

- **National and regional dialogue conferences** could be held at least once a year involving social NGOs and People experiencing poverty (LT, NL, SE).
- **Regular dialogue meetings should be more timely** to allow for proper consultation/dialogue, i.e. well before drafting the NRP (FI, FR, LT) and commenting on the CSRs (NL).
- The **meetings should be based on a partnership approach**: there needs to be recognition of NGOs as a valued partner by government, on an equal basis as social partners. Stakeholders should be **involved in proposing topics** and deciding the agenda as well as providing inputs (SE).
- Anti-poverty NGOs could **further serve as a bridge between people facing poverty** directly, and Government and EC officials, to help better understanding about the Semester (BE, NL). National governments should work with EAPN to **organise national People Experiencing Poverty meetings** which could then take messages into account in the NRP (FI).
- **Joint thematic working groups could address key challenges** involving NGOs as partners, for example, conducting a study and developing a standard definition of adequacy of minimum income and income support, then present recommendations/results to the Semester (MT).
- Ministries should **inform people and media** more about the Semester process – making media aware and writing articles about the impact on policy content to which governments have made a commitment, e.g. the poverty target and success in reducing poverty (EE, FI).

## 6. Final Comments

- **Who is it for?** The Semester must be promoted as an instrument to **improve the lives of ordinary people**... not just for economic growth (BE, FR, IE, UK).
- **The Semester must become more social!** (BE) with a **full mainstreaming approach to embed the EPSR** and the SDGs (ES) and to prevent negative macroeconomic approaches (BE, ES).
- Whilst **improvements are being made at EU level**, the **real test is the impact at the national level** – both in terms of effective engagement and impact on policy (IE).
- The Semester must have **greater transparency and visibility** at national level, monitoring also how it is being promoted currently at national level (EE).
- **Civil Society engagement is crucial but comes at a price** – more resources must be invested to enable CSOs to provide the EU with quality information and grassroots evidence, not relying on voluntary input.
- **Dialogue with people with direct experience of poverty is essential to signpost what works/doesn't work, but also to propose viable solutions (DE).**

## Annex 1 Status of the Document

This EAPN assessment is issued on behalf of the EU Inclusion Strategies Group (EUISG) which has delegated powers within EAPN to develop EAPN policy position papers and reports. Inputs were collected from 26 networks (24 from EU Member States): (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, EL, ES, FI, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, MT, LU, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, UK) with 2 benchmarking inputs from EAPN Norway and Serbia. Further input was drawn from a mutual learning exchange in the EU Inclusion Strategies group held in Brussels on the 14-15 June, involving also EAPN CY, MK, IC and SK and the European Organisations: IFSW and Age Platform Europe. The draft report was circulated to the EUISG with a month for comments. Amendments were received from EAPN BE, FI, IE and PT. All inputs were incorporated in the final report. The report was drafted by EAPN Policy Team: Sian Jones, Amana Ferro and Stefania Renna, policy intern.









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**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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