

Leaders' commitments at Sibiu must be backed up by concrete strategies and actions to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, support the vulnerable and mitigate the climate emergency.

16 MAY, BRUSSELS

Never before has the future of Europe been so in question. Social Europe - based on the guarantee of effective welfare states - is brought into question by the persistence of poverty and exclusion of more than 100 million citizens, and by anti-democratic political trends that want to take rights away from citizens.

This election time is a pivotal moment for our European Union, and the Sibiu Summit has been a key moment. EAPN - a civil society network working for a Europe free of poverty of social exclusion - acknowledges that the need for more environmental, economic and social cohesion is gaining currency in the discussions on the future of Europe, but ***we need and demand more than words***. Commitments are welcome, but it is hard to reconcile the social and environmental emergencies we see on the ground with **10 commitments which don't even mention poverty or social rights, despite the agreement to the European Pillar of Social Rights, and seem to relegate climate change to an afterthought.**

"It has been too long that it is difficult to live and even to survive. For years, we have been promised things. We have been told that our situation would get better. For years the state has been giving us something on the one hand but at the same time it takes away something else, and finally the situation does not improve, on the contrary."

(Guy, expert with direct experience of poverty, during the political debate of the Walloon Network against Poverty on 7 May 2019, Belgium.)

EAPN reactions to the specific commitments are outlined below:

<p>1. We will defend one Europe - from East to West, from North to South. Thirty years ago millions of people fought for their freedom and for unity and brought down the Iron Curtain, which had divided Europe for decades. There is no place for divisions that work against our collective interest.</p>	<p><i>EAPN wants one Europe which works together towards our common future, with a key role of promoting peace and prosperity for all.</i></p>
<p>2. We will stay united, through thick and thin. We will show each other solidarity in times of need and we will always stand together. We can and we will speak with one voice.</p>	<p><i>This united and strong Europe should not be just a unity of markets, nor a select club for technocrats and the wealthy. Europe should be for everyone, and no-one should be left behind. This solidarity must include our shared responsibility to eradicate poverty in all its forms.</i></p>
<p>3. We will always look for joint solutions, listening to each other in a spirit of understanding and respect.</p>	<p><i>Civil society must be recognised as a key partner in this search for joint solutions to develop a strong, social, democratic and sustainable Europe, eradicating poverty and social exclusion, tackling multiple inequalities (including gender, wealth, income and territorial) and ending discrimination, racism and xenophobia.</i></p>
<p>4. We will continue to protect our way of life, democracy and the rule of law. The unalienable rights and the fundamental freedoms of all Europeans were hard fought and will never be taken for granted. We will uphold our shared values and principles enshrined in the Treaties.</p>	<p><i>“Democracy and the rule of law” are excellent commitments but are not so meaningful to millions of Europeans’ everyday lives. To the nearly 25% of the EU population living at risk of poverty; the millions of jobless youngsters; the disabled individuals who cannot get a job; the nearly 10% of people who do work still living in poverty, these commitments feel rhetorical. People don't feel confident and tend not to trust our national governments, nor the EU. The situation of vulnerable people in Europe must be meaningfully addressed, and quickly, for the sake of everyone, so everyone can live a dignified life and participate as active citizens.</i></p>
<p>5. We will deliver where it matters most. Europe will continue to be big on big matters. We will continue to listen to the concerns and hopes of all Europeans, bringing the Union closer to our citizens, and we will act accordingly, with ambition and determination.</p>	<p><i>What “matters most” to citizens? Good quality, decent jobs, with enabling wages and good labour conditions, which could be established through an EU framework for adequate minimum wage allowing people to live in dignity – as called for by our 2017 Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty. Guaranteed income, when there are no decent jobs available, or when people cannot participate in the labour market, guaranteed by an EU Framework Directive for adequate Minimum Income. Children's welfare, which could be assured by through a Child Guarantee and support for universal Child Benefit, which would combat the high rates of child poverty and the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Decent pensions, enough to enable a decent standard of living, with affordable long-term healthcare services. Social housing, so no one suffers from homelessness. Affordable services for all, to develop a meaningful, healthy and safe lives.</i></p>

<p>6. We will always uphold the principle of fairness, whether it be in the labour market, in welfare, in the economy or in the digital transformation. We will further reduce disparities between us and we will always help the most vulnerable in Europe, putting people before politics.</p>	<p><i>Ending poverty is a political choice. A united EU must eradicate poverty and social exclusion and reduce inequality, putting people's welfare above profit, in all key conflicts of interest within the political debate. Furthermore, no more poverty or inequality should be generated by EU macroeconomic and fiscal policies, as were by the austerity policies implemented during the economic crisis. This is a matter of social justice, not simply fairness, and should be recognised as such.</i></p>
<p>7. We will give ourselves the means to match our ambitions. We will provide the Union with the means necessary to attain its objectives and carry through its policies.</p>	<p><i>The EU should do this by modifying the Treaty of Lisbon to make the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights a binding source of primary law not only in the EU, but in every Member State, transforming the Stability and Growth Pact into Stability and Wellbeing Pact, and the European Semester guidelines to recognize that health, education, social services, social housing and pension systems are the fundamental basis of the European Social Model and therefore must be protected and guaranteed through adequate funding. The EU should also step up tax collection, promote more progressive taxation and stronger legal and enforcement measures against corruption, tax evasion and avoidance - as a matter of tax justice and of raising adequate resources to fund services, social protection systems and to address challenges for climate change.</i></p>
<p>8. We will safeguard the future for the next generations of Europeans. We will invest in young people and build a Union fit for the future, able to cope with the most pressing challenges of the 21st century.</p>	<p><i>To do this the EU must declare an "environment and climate emergency", to set a far more ambitious strategy to tackle climate change, to protect the environment and biodiversity for the present and future generations, as well as people experiencing poverty who are the first to be affected by climate change. Governments must prioritise the protection of people experiencing poverty during the transition, respecting the principle of no-one left behind. We need to transform the European Semester into the Social and Sustainable Semester, ensuring that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are mainstreamed in every EU policy, to bring a balanced approach to economic, social and environmental policies. The SDGs should be the backbone of the post EU2020 strategy.</i></p>
<p>9. We will protect our citizens and keep them safe by investing in our soft and hard power and by working with our international partners.</p>	<p><i>Protection must mean safeguarding our rights and living standards, not only security and military defence. Nearly half of EU citizens don't trust the EU and this situation cannot be changed by more nice declarations, soft words and smiles to the camera. We want to be part of this shared adventure, with everyone onboard. The EU leaders expressed these symbolic manifestations of unity and shared concern for the protection of citizens at this Summit. However, we need this optimistic, highly committed inspiration, to lead to concrete strategies and a roadmap for delivery on the eradication of poverty.</i></p>

<p>10. Europe will be a responsible global leader. The challenges we face today affect us all. We will continue working with our partners in the world to uphold and develop the rules-based international order, to make the most of new trading opportunities and to jointly tackle global issues such as preserving our environment and fighting climate change.</p>	<p><i>Europe <u>is</u> already a responsible global leader. We demand that the European Union becomes a fair, positive, credible and responsible leader in global peacekeeping, environmental and social protection, development cooperation, promoting human rights throughout the world (including safe migration and refugee management in the Human Rights framework) - and the promotion of equality.</i></p>
---	--

The Sibiu Summit could become the place where the democratic and sustainable “Future of Europe” was strengthened, if the Declaration’s spirit is followed by concrete measures and outputs.

EAPN’s President, Carlos Susias, reflected in this regard: ***“Today, EU leaders have made 10 commitments – including to reduce inequalities between us and focus on the most vulnerable in Europe. It is encouraging to see such political commitment to the most vulnerable, recognizing the spirit of ‘Leave no-one behind’ embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals. This gives a strong mandate to the next European Commission and Parliament to deliver meaningful change for the millions of Europeans who still live at risk of poverty, trapped by our political and economic systems. EAPN will continue fighting for a Europe free of poverty and counts on the support of our political leaders to make this a reality. We hope they will not disappoint us.”***

ABOUT EAPN

The [European Anti-Poverty Network \(EAPN\)](#) is the largest European network of national, regional and local networks, involving anti-poverty NGOs and grassroots groups as well as European Organisations, active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. We have been contributing to the Future of Europe discussions over the last year, with our position paper on the [Future of Europe](#), our [response](#) to EU Consultation on Future of Europe, [advocacy letters](#) in advance of Summit and contributions to Future of Europe dialogues at the national and European levels. We are currently preparing our position paper on the post-2020 strategy.