**EUISG Webinar Exchange: Thursday 2 April 2-4**

**Getting progress on poverty and social rights in the European Semester and Country Reports**

**Short Report**

***Chair: Sian Jones with Mathias Maucher and Rebecca Lee***

***Objectives:***

* *Update on changes in 2020 European Semester including ASGS*
* *Assess 2020 Country Reports and member participation, based on member inputs*
* *Discuss and agree common key messages, in the context of COVID 19 impact.*

**Draft Agenda**

**14.00 Welcome/Introduction/objectives of webinar: *Sian Jones, EAPN Policy Coordinator***

Welcome and introduction by Sian, who presented the agenda and objectives

**14.10 Overview of new EU developments in the European Semester 2020, including Communication on Country Reports: *Mathias Maucher, EAPN Policy Officer***

=> [Slide set](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EAPN-3c-European-Semester-Update-April-2020-4247.ppt)

**14.25 Q & A**

No questions

**14.30 5 minute Snapshot Assessments of 2020 Country Reports:** *what progress? on EPSR, SDGs, CSRs, use of EU funds, participation? What recommendations? (5 mins)*

* **Spain: *Graciela Malgesini/EUISG co-chair*** => [Slide set](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EAPN-3c-CR-Assessment-ES-4251.pdf)
* Still very big challenges, also before Coronavirus pandemic, due to high rates of unemployment and high numbers of forms of precarious employment
* Still persistent regional differences as regards MI benefits, low rates also compared to MW, complications with MI due to different administrative layers/responsibilities, Spanish government, however, announced in the last days they would finally launch national MI scheme very soon
* Reference in Country Report to performance of Spain on Social Scoreboard indicators, with Graciela also talking about developments and focusing on the issues/areas still flagged up as critical etc.
* CR in principle support EAPN’s own analysis which also shows that documents and evidence submitted by EAPN Spain were conscientiously read, they are also quoted
* CR also focusing on impact of climate change on sustainability of economy, health systems (interesting to see which issues were highlighted in the CR prior to the Coronavirus pandemic as problematic in the health care sector, they unfortunately turned out to be true), Graciela asking other colleagues if this is also the case in their home country
* Unexpected positive effect of Coronavirus pandemic: better recognition (also in social protection) of domestic workers, these improvements obviously also should stay and not be withdrawn
* **Lithuania:** ***Rimgailė Matulionytė*** => [Slide set](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EAPN-3c-CR-Assessment-LT-4249.pptx)
* They found positive the recognition in the CR of persistent challenges/problems due to income inequalities, which is good in a Lithuanian context as often EC avoids putting the finger in the wound and being too critical when assessing the outcomes of government policies
* Very likely positive effect of meeting/exchange EAPN Lithuania had with ESO and DG EMPL Desk Officer, at least clearly visible in view of problems highlighted with access to social services that were flagged up
* Problematic is still the lack of focus on low benefits levels, no focus on MI, which is also surprising given good report of national institution on exactly these issues which was not taken up/referred to in the CR
* Poverty Watch for Lithuania should have devoted a section on improvements, but there were not that many, except for minor (but not poverty-proof) increases of universal child benefit and old age pensions
* CSR: See slide set
* **Portugal: *Paula Cruz***
* Positive: Main social challenges, as basically also seen by EAPN Portugal, are well recognised in the CR, good assessment of social issues
* Positive in general is the reference to SDGs, but it appears as if this has mainly happened due to the “formal requirement” to now include the SDGs in the ES. This integration and the cross-referencing of principles of EPSR and SDGs might also have a problematic consequence if SDG performance becomes benchmark. E.g. poverty is not seen as a big problem any more in the CR as objective SDG1 is used, not AROPE to come to this assessment, which is obviously problematic
* Missing: No reference to homeless people, to Roma, weakness of social protection system, inadequate MI, nevertheless in Social Scoreboard improvements are shown
* CSR 2019: Progress made on CSR 2 on labour market segmentation/precarious jobs
* CSR 2020 recommendation: Need to ringfence public, affordable and accessible health, housing, social, etc. services + Need to invest in social housing and more generally also in affordable housing; Need for EU Anti-Poverty Strategy NOW (“If not now, when then?”)
* Impact of participation/involvement: Visible, but limited when it comes to the recognition and real policy action to address the lack of effectiveness of social protection schemes and benefits
* Positive recent development: Government law/regulation providing access to health care services for before undocumented migrants which were regularised, but local health centres still are/or will be now even more crowded
* **Ireland: *Paul Ginnell***
* Positive: Social situation and problems fairly well acknowledged in CR, EU indicators also useful to “counterbalance” use of different national statistics which can be/are used to downplay problems; Progress with regard to the poverty risk situation of people with disabilities and children also recognised
* Under conditions of Coronavirus pandemic an emergency unemployment benefit was set at more than 300 Euro weekly compared to about 100 Euro until
* Persistent problems with two-tiered health system as patients in private sector could, also now, jump queues, but Irish government took control of private sector to make it fight against Coronavirus pandemic at highest capacity, too
* Missing: Still no integrated anti-poverty approach, too strong focus on labour market integration and activation measures, also for people with disabilities, also Irish Anti-Poverty Plan not referencing it.
* Not all principles of EPSR integrated/analysed/assessed, would need to be clearly demanded in EPSR Action Plan
* In principle good to have annex on SDGs, but as in case of Portugal it informs that Ireland is doing well on objective SDG1, implying no problem with poverty which is obviously wrong, insofar risk of replacing of EU-level indicators and targets by SDGs
* EAPN Ireland made inputs to the ESO and with the Better Europe Alliance, which were partly taken on board.
* **Age Platform: *Philippe Seidel***
* We might run into difficulties with “underlying floor of SDGs” when it comes to poverty reduction focus/objectives, as said/explained by other colleagues, quite some language on poverty and social exclusion has disappeared from the CR
* Unfortunately, there are no good statistics disaggregated by age-groups and allowing focus on older people
* No change, in-built dilemma still persists, between the two poles of macro-economic and social objectives
* AGE members would like to see/have indicators on social isolation, as this also has an impact on mental health status, etc.
* Energy poverty not raised in CR
* Gender pay and pension gap no longer focused on that much, at least in many CR
* No focus more on older workers, in earlier years yes, under the angle of increased labour market participation
* Not a lot of focus on regional disparities, also in access to public and private services, including banking, food shops, etc., which is a problem for older persons with reduced mobility
* Focus on dimension “fairness” might be problematic (could also be understood in a way that those that contribute a lot should get a lot back), would be better to focus on social justice – as this builds the bridge to social rights -, solidarity, and universality or universal services
* CSR: AGE demand to reintroduce monitoring of older workers labour market participation as well as on of gender pay and pension gap as well as on adult learning, by also using a target/benchmark of the European Education and Training Strategy 2020 (set at 15%, but regularly achieving participation rates of only 10% on average in the EU)
* Stronger focus needed on analysis of poverty risks of older persons (75+ / 85+) as they might suffer most from too low increases/indexation of old age pensions
* Stronger focus on need to provide connectivity also for older people, not only focus on digital skills
* Clever use of digital devices/technology in elderly care sector (for services, but also to address challenges of social isolation/participation)

**15.10 Q & A**

N.B.: Questions to 5 speakers and their answers included above already

**15. 15 Sharing of experiences from other national networks/ EO’s**

* MT: CR good, except for MI; COVID 19 risks to destroy MI as priority at EU-level; idea to promote digital currency to facilitate access to MI benefits; Maltese government stipulated that minimum wage should be paid to everybody now having lost her/his job, such a measure is unprecedented
* PL: CR good, positive impact on poverty highlighted of clearly raised family benefits; also good that media took up information on CR and from EAPN PL and helped a lot to raise attention and availability
* UK: Good that SDGs are integrated, but they are not used as framework for the analysis; No link between environmental and social objectives and politics in CR; focus still to much on structural adjustments and fiscal consolidation measures; lack of consistent gender- and age-sensitive/-focused analyses; main poverty-related indicators showing a development for the last years highlighting that government policies are going in wrong direction; CSR on investment portray investment on social still as mostly being a threat to economic growth; no raising of minimum wages, who will pay for the crisis, idea to use assets of enterprises now financially supported or “nationalised” later; risk that Coronavirus pandemic will be used to put more pressure on “the poor” and “the old”; progress on environmental objectives proclaimed in CR, but this is done at the detriment of much-needed investment in health and housing, support only for skills development to support move towards low-carbon economy, not on any aspect beyond
* FR: differences in analysis become smaller between CR and EAPN FR own analysis; positive that investment in housing/social housing is mentioned as priority; problematic, however, is the continued focus on/recommendations given not to raise wages, to cut public services and that pension reform goes in the right direction
* NL: Need to use momentum after crisis to increase (minimum) wages in sectors now finally perceived as essential as health, elderly care and grocery sector, etc., big public support for this and public discussion (in the same way also in Germany)

Need to have stronger focus on working poor and precarious employment/jobs

* HU: Unfortunately, no real focus in CR on energy poverty; now challenge with access to education for children of poor households not having digital devices and/or affordable energy to connect
* BE: Critical about the fact that CR shows a lack of ambition to tackle poverty, EU 2020 poverty reduction target not mentioned/referred to anymore, also no strong reference to the poverty-related indicators in the Social Scoreboard; risk that focus on just transition (even though always claimed that social consequences would be looked at) will push back policy attention and efforts on poverty reduction
* CZ: Good that with Coronavirus pandemic there is more sensibility for situation of over-indebted persons and the effect of the crisis on them and the need for targeted government support to prevent increasing poverty and/or bankruptcies of self-employed with high debts

**15. 30 Key issues: *Are the Country Reports a step back or forward? Are the SDGs/ EPSR adequately reflected? Good balance between green/social and economic? What’s missing? Did members engage and get their issues taken on board?***

***Key Points***

* Country reports are seen as showing mixed progress. On the one hand: greater focus on social issues linked to the EPSR/SDGs, however, there is a lack of coherence and consistency: the SDGs are mainly in the annex, whilst the social scoreboard provides focus in main text, rather than the EPSR 20 principles. In many CRs there is notably less focus on poverty, and only on the EU averages related to the Scoreboard AROPE indicator rather than analysing progress on the Europe 2020 poverty target.
* The continued priority to macroeconomic priorities including environmental growth/European Green Deal is notable and with more prominence/pages than social issues. The Annex D is entirely focussed on Just Transition measures, rather than Social Rights.
* The Country Reports were produced too early to capture impact of COVID19 or policy measures. The CSRs will need to be re-focussed on COVID19 mitigating the social impact and protecting people experiencing poverty/preventing poverty.
* Unlike 2008, Several Members States have acted quickly to mitigate negative social impact with several important measures eg expanding unconditional income support (IE), rehousing homeless off the streets (PT), access to health and other services for migrants (PT), strengthening of minimum income support and unemployment benefit (PL, ES).
* What’s missing is: integrated to fight poverty strategy, beyond a jobs alone approach, coherent economic/environmental and social approach to investment in social rights, and sustainable financing – tax justice, key target groups missed and lacking strategic approach– eg homeless, Roma, migrants, people with disabilities, older people, women.
* Participation improving, but very uneven: Several members felt that their interaction with the Semester and Desk officers had improved through bilateral meetings, or shared drafts. In some cases this had delivered tangible results (PT, ES, PL, IE, LT), but still an uneven playing field.

**15.45 Key Messages on 2020 Country Reports, in the context of COVID 19?**

**3 main messages**

***1) Country reports must give equal priority to Social Rights and Social Investment, ensure coherence and consistency*** *between EPRS and SDGS, across MS and with economic and environmental policies. The poverty target/ delivered through effective integrated strategies beyond employment alone needs to be restored as a priority focus.*

*2)* ***The CSRs cannot be based on the Country Reports alone but must be re-focussed on short-term measures*** *to prevent and tackle poverty/social exclusion, as well as long-term investment in welfare states and public services. Adequate minimum income and wages are key.*

*3)* ***Obligatory guidelines and equal support/resources is needed*** *to ensure a level playing field across the EU in the meaningful engagement of CSOs in the Semester/Country Reports*

15.55 Wrapping up: *Sian Jones, Policy Coordinator*

* Thanks, to all the participants and apologies for any technical difficulties.
* Next steps: the policy team will draft EAPN CR assessment based on fiche inputs and the webinar, and send out to members on Friday the 10, with a deadline for comments by Monday 20th April. To be finalized for the beginning of May.
* The next webinar will be on Thursday 23 April 10-12, the agenda will be shortly confirmed.
* All webinar documents will be on the Members Room -> EUISG documents -> meeting documents.
* A recording of this webinar can be viewed [here](https://youtu.be/8HtIgmHezQ4).

**16.00 End of Webinar**