**Fiche to Respond to the Country Reports 2020**

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**Assessment of Country Reports 2020**

**1a) What are the positive developments in the Country Report on poverty reduction, social rights, and participation of civil society and people experiencing poverty?**

It’s positive that grasping the structural problems is maintained in the Country report: low tax progressivity, low funding of social security, regional disparities in Lithuania are highlighted in the report. Very positive development is growing attention to public services. Although there’s usually very little of hard data on that and we know that Commission tends to avoid to incorporate problems with no hard data, public services are there. Low accessibility and quality of social services, care services, transport, education etc. are mentioned. *(We think that our meeting with the Desk officer and the Semester officer might have caused that as we strongly argued that these are very problematic issues.)* However, more elaboration on these issues would be even more welcome.

Every year we notice growing attention to income inequality and social exclusion in our report (*except the CSR development part, see 1d)*). It is even more noticeable while observing Commission’s PR: these are the key highlights in their press releases, interviews and events in which they present the report.

**1b) What are the negative development or missing elements/issues?**

Even though low social benefits are mentioned in the report, they are mentioned very briefly. In the report it is also mainly linked with low funding of social security. It is not entirely true, especially speaking about minimum income.

Minimum income particularly is not mentioned in the CR. It is rather disappointing because the National Audit Office released a very comprehensive report on that. Their conclusions are very straight: minimum income in Lithuania is not adequate, not accessible and not enabling (*I will not elaborate here on that unless needed. I also think I already sent to you our paragraph on MI where I use their analysis*). So, I think it was a great opportunity to mentioned MI and use all the hard data from that analysis but it wasn’t done.

**1c) How well are the SDGs/Pillar of Social Rights incorporated and well-balanced with economic and environmental priorities**

Balance was not reached, but I would say that it has improved. We especially observe much more attention to environmental issues. However, SDGs is definitely not the core of this report. The attempt to include the SDGs to the CR mainly relies on linking some statements and indicators with the SDGs. It looks rather forced and synthetic (*cannot find the right expression*) and in essence does not reflect the idea of SDGs.

**1d) Are the 2019 Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs) being implemented? Is this positive/negative?**

Implementation of the CSRs was very poor (*a bit funny example: in our PW 2019 we initially intended to make a separate section: what was done to reduce the poverty, but we didn’t make the section because there was too little to say about that*).

That’s why we were very disappointed that our development with the CSR (Address income inequality, poverty and social exclusion, including by improving the design of the tax and benefit system.) was evaluated as some progress. We do not agree with that and our evaluation would be limited progress.

Also, looking into detail what was mentioned as some progress, we only see two main things: the increase in universal child benefit; indexation and additional increase of pensions. Knowing that the both measures (universal child benefit and indexation of pensions) were introduced a few years ago (and mentioned in the previous CR) it is hard to understand why a *slight increase* of these benefits is considered as progress. Although we think that those were positive steps but they were very little. They were not structural changes and will not have a significant impact in the future.

**1e) Does Annex D provide a useful support of EU funding to social rights/poverty reduction?**

Not at all, it is only focused on energy, emissions and impact on business. (Can’t even comment on that as there’s almost nothing that I understand)

**2. What are your alternative Country -Specific Recommendations?** (Check your Recommendations from the EAPN assessment of the 2019 Country Reports and alternative Recommendations last year [here](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/EAPN-2019-EAPN-Country-Report-Assessment-and-CSR-Proposals-3580.pdf) and propose 3 Recommendations for 2020 with short justification)

1) Tax regulation that would be more progressive and fairer to lower-paid employees. More funding to social security.

2) Improved adequacy and coverage of the social assistance, further strengthening of positive work incentives and linking MI schemes with social services.

3) Structural changes in provision of public services: improved accessibility and quality of public services. Changes in social services must rely on people’s needs: clear methodology on how to evaluate people’s needs and how to respond to them. Clear actions must be taken to tackle homelessness. Accessibility of early education for children must become the priority.

**3. What Key Messages would you send about this year’s Country Report? Has it improved? New elements? Overall concerns?**

* 1) SDGs should become the core of the report. This doesn’t mean just referencing to it. There must be a perfect balance between all social/economic/environmental issues. Also, it must reflect the main values of SDGs: poverty is the issue number 1 and nobody should be left behind.
* 2) Positive: small steps were taken in terms of including evaluation of “softer” policy measures (public services), but more elaboration would be even more welcome; a highlight on income inequality which is hidden under economic growth.
* 3) MI must become a subject of analysis in the report, especially after the current crisis.