



EUISG Webinar 30/09/2020 EAPN Portugal

Exchange with European Commission on members' recommendations drawn from their Poverty Watches and European Semester work

EAPN Portugal has been following the European semester in order to monitor the progress (or not) on poverty and social rights. When we look to the Country Report presented in the beginning of this year we saw an improvement in the analysis made about social issues. The reference to the Sustainable Development Goals as well as the European Pillar of Social Rights was quite relevant. However, once again we noticed that the report misses the opportunity to **mainstreaming the 20 principles of the EPSR** through the analyses that is done. I'm saying this in particular because this is a risk. Yesterday our Prime Minister presented the *Recovery and Resilience Plan* (still under discussion) and the European Pillar of Social Rights was mentioned – that was quite good – but it was focused in the priority named *Productive Potential*¹. The European pillar of social rights is more than that. Is for example, the minimum income (**adequate minimum income**). And I'm also saying this by going back again to the country report in which the assessment of the Commission concerning the 2019 Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) was not very positive: *Portugal has made limited progress*. In our analysis of the CSRs we have highlighted as positive the concern of the Commission towards the need to *improve the effectiveness and adequacy of the social safety net*. In the Report the Commission clearly indicates that there has been limited progress in this area and assumes that even

¹ The Plan has also an important priority on Social Vulnerabilities in which there is a focus on *Housing*. The idea is to intervene on emergency, vulnerability and temporary accommodation. In this last item the priority is homeless people.

Portugal is performing well on the most aspects of the EPSR, this is not the case for social protection: **“changes to the social protection system have not improved the contribution of social transfers to poverty reduction”**.

The Commission also highlighted that from a structural point of view, the limited impact of social transfers on poverty as well as the rising house prices, remains a challenge for the Portuguese economy. However, recognizes that poverty and inequality continue to decrease.

This is clearly an important point that we need to work on. In our **Poverty watch** we have highlighted the impact of COVID-19 in employment and we have mentioned the increase in unemployment, for example, between February and May. In fact at the end of May there were more than 400 000 registered unemployed, 16 600 more than the previous month. The majority of this population is female (55%), over 25 years of age (89%), with basic education (50%) and secondary education (32%). We have assisted to layoff situations and close of companies and we have assisted too, since March, to an inversion in the number of beneficiaries of the social integration income. There was a significant increase. And there was also a significant increase in the requests for food. In this particular case the Government announced the extension of the national FEAD program to respond to the requests. It is difficult to mention all the difficulties, but the drop in income is particularly felt. The interviews we conducted with **people in poverty** revealed just that: the **loss of income** in the ability to meet day-to-day expenses, pay the rent, etc So we are going to see an increase in poverty in the country. And like we have said in other occasions we still miss a **real national strategy to fight poverty**² and we need that the **national plan of the European pillar of social rights** could be a reference for the national strategy. We also need to strengthen social protection and create the necessary foundations for the definition of an adequate minimum income system. I have mentioned that we have increased the number of beneficiaries but I didn't mention that in May the average of Social Insertion Income benefit per family was 260.62€ and per individual 118.10€. So we are talking about an **important**

² Recently we had a meeting with the Minister of the Presidency and we were informed that the Government wants to define a national strategy.

measure to reduce the severity of poverty but it is not yet an effective measure to fight poverty.

Finally I want to highlight that we need to **promote the effective participation of different stakeholders**. We have been present at some of the meetings promoted by the Commission, the Semester Office and even, recently we have participated in the webex of EPSR with Commissioner Schmit. But at the national level, we still need a real platform for dialogue, such as the social partners.

Yesterday the President Von der Ley quoted Camões in Lisbon and she said that she is counting with Portugal to *guide Europe through the storm*. This was a sign of confidence. And we need to see how this confidence will be reflected in the Presidency of next year and in the action plan of the EPSR. It would be also important to see this confidence translated in **more space for participation**. The same space for dialogue and participation of different stakeholders - especially civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty - it's the best way for all of us understand and row in the same direction through the *storm*.