



## ***EAPN Capacity Building Webinar for national networks and European organisations***

### **How can we strengthen and make more effective EAPN's engagement in the European Semester?**

*19 November 2020, 14:30-17:00*

*Concept Note (as of 28 October 2020)*

#### **1) Context: The reformed European Semester, also impacted by the COVID19 pandemic**

The **European Semester** is the **key current process for the joint development and implementation of social and sustainable strategies for the European Union**. It has operated since 2010 within the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy. It has become a **crucial instrument for implementing the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**.

EAPN has always fought for a **good balance between the principles of the EPSR and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the predominantly macro-economic orientation of the Semester**. The same holds for the use of appropriate indicators (from the Social Scoreboard and beyond) to monitor the situation of countries and progress made (or not). "Europe 2020" ends this year and has not yet been replaced by another overarching Europe 2030 Strategy – and this will normally also not happen anymore. As of 2021 the Action Plan for the implementation of the EPSR is expected to become the new overarching policy framework for the EU in the fields of employment, social policy and inequalities.

The **European Semester process was reformed in 2020 to meet the four priorities of the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS)**: For the first time it included in 2020 an **implicit social objective, "fairness"**. It should also deliver on the "European Green Deal" and the related "Just Transition" initiatives as well as on the SDGs. With these changes there is **some uncertainty amongst anti-poverty organisations on the overall balance between economic, green and social objectives** and about how far poverty and social rights stay a clear priority. The **devastating impact of COVID19 pandemic raises further concerns about the short and long-term approach to fight poverty and social exclusion<sup>1</sup>** and the commitment to an effective, rights-based EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, underpinned by EU funds. With the **European Semester cycle 2021** came additional changes: **It brings about other deliverables** (i.e. the Recovery and Resilience Plans), **timelines** (with a deadline of end of April 2021 for their submission and exchanges on preliminary plans as of mid-October) **and an institutional set-up which make a structured and meaningful involvement of civil society organisations more difficult**. Also, the Joint Employment Report 2021 is still to be published in November.

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<sup>1</sup> EAPN focused its [Policy Conference](#) on 14 July 2020, based on a [study](#) on the impact of Covid-19 on people experiencing poverty and vulnerability



## 2) Rationale and importance for EAPN to get involved in the European Semester

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), through close involvement with the EU Poverty Programmes of the 90s, then the Social Open Method of Coordination, and finally the European Semester during the past decade, has built a wealth of expertise and a solid body of good practices of engagement with the European Semester, at both national and EU level. **This expertise and EAPN's continued engagement in the European Semester have been repeatedly recognised both by the European Commission, European Parliament, SPC as well as by other civil society organisations, trade unions, academics, and other partners.**

**At national level, many members have found the European Semester a powerful instrument to lobby their national governments and raise their profile and impact.** For members to engage and stay engaged it is important to see the advantages of their work with the national governments, the European Semester Officers and the Country Desk Officers. EAPN is often called on to provide training and capacity-building to other stakeholders on how to better mobilise and get involved with such social policy processes and frameworks. EAPN has won a change in the guidelines that underpin the European Semester **recognising civil society as a partner to the process and putting this involvement on a new legal basis<sup>2</sup>.**

EAPN with its members in April 2020 issued an **analysis of the [Country Reports](#) and in June 2020 of the [Country-Specific Recommendations](#)**. We made **[proposals for Country-Specific Recommendations](#)**, with a strong focus on policies to effectively address the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of EAPN's comprehensive assessment of key elements of 2020 European Semester cycle, we in January 2020 issued our **assessment of the [AGSG and JER](#)**. This was preceded by **[EAPN's assessment of the 2019 European Semester](#)** published in September 2019, having one focus on the participation dimension.

There is a **strong case to be made for the need to urgently and actively engage with these processes**, to ensure that poverty and social rights are a main priority, that the EU puts people and planet are put before profit, and that we are moving towards a social and sustainable Europe. The **European Semester provides a development framework for the European Union and its Member States**. It is also a **direct driver for EU funding opportunities**, most significantly from the Structural Funds (and in particular from the ESF+) and since this year also from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Stakeholders, including civil society organisations, are supposed to be key partners in the delivery of policies and legislation both at national and EU level.

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<sup>2</sup> The [2020 Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies](#) of the Member States mentions in Recital 5: While pursuing environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness and stability, the European Semester integrates the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including strong engagement with social partners, civil society and other stakeholders. It highlights in Recital 10: "While the Integrated Guidelines are addressed to Member States and the Union, they should be implemented in partnership with all national, regional and local authorities, closely involving parliaments, as well as the social partners and representatives of civil society". This procedural obligation is also clearly spelled out in Employment Guideline 7 "Enhancing the functioning of labour markets and the effectiveness of social dialogue": "Where relevant and building on existing national practices, Member States should take into account the experience on employment and social issues of relevant civil society organisations".



### 3) EAPN European Semester Toolkits and EAPN Capacity Building Seminars

Every year in spring, EAPN prepares a [Toolkit](#), designed to help EAPN members engage during with the European Semester, delivering on the poverty reduction target as well as the policy priorities of the European Pillar of Social Rights, etc.. This is in line with EAPN's Strategic Plan and Work Programme 2020. The Toolkit aims at providing members with brief, to-the-point information about the processes and the opportunities for engagement, by clarifying the key elements, timeline, and strategic actors of the processes, as well as suggesting different ways of involvement, and giving good practice examples. Given the big changes in the 2021 European Semester Cycle the webinar will deal with the adaptations needed.

Over the past few years, more targeted and dynamic support around engaging with these processes has been demanded by EAPN members. **EAPN on 2 December 2019 organised a first webinar with its members** to present the content of the Toolkit and to better support members in understanding the relevant frameworks of the reformed European Semester and the role they can play. The recording of the event and all relevant presentations can be accessed (for EAPN members) in the Members' Room under "EUIS Group Documents", then "[Materials from webinars/capacity buildings/conferences](#)".

#### 4) Aims of the webinar

1. Providing basic information about the relevance and functioning of the European Semester, it's main stages, documents and timelines until 2020 included, as well as about the relevant EU-level policy frameworks implemented through it
2. Providing members with updates about the main changes of the European Semester Cycle 2021 and what this implies for their engagement
3. Providing practical tips for engaging with the European Semester by national networks and European organisations, both through feeding into the different stages of the European Semester Cycle 2021, but also through monitoring the efficiency and impact of policies to fight against poverty, advance social rights.
4. Mutual learning through good practices already existing in EAPN, knowledge-sharing and exchange of information on what works and what does not work.
5. Facilitating a joint assessment of how to use EAPN's work on the European Semester to strengthen the capacities of members to influence policies.

#### 5) Target audience

EAPN members (specifically EUISG and EXCO members, but also people in the network responsible for policy and advocacy and people with direct experience of poverty) in National Networks, but also in the European Organisations members of EAPN.

#### 6) Recording of webinar

As in 2019, the webinar will be recorded and published on EAPN's YouTube channels and other media to allow a wider dissemination and use also for those EAPN members and EO members of EAPN interested, but not able to participate in the webinar.