**EUISG Webinar Exchange: Thursday 23 April 10-12**

**COVID19 & policy responses: What impact on poverty & exclusion?**

**Short Report**

***Chair: Sian Jones/Mathias Maucher; Notes: Sian Jones, Mathias Maucher, Rebecca Lee***

**Objectives**

* *To update members on EU state of play regarding COVID10, EU policy and EAPN action, also presenting EAPN Survey and questionnaire.*
* *To exchange on impact on poverty from COVID 19 and policy response: which vulnerable groups are most affected? What policy actions have been taken by governments? Positive/negative measures.*
* *What policy solutions/recommendations? At national and EU level*

***AGENDA***

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

**10.10 EAPN action so far: *Mathias Maucher, EAPN Policy Officer***

**10.20 EU Social Response to COVID 19*: Katalin Szatmari, European Commission, DG Jobs and Social Rights***

**10.30 Q & A**

**10.40 Presentation of EAPN Survey/Questionnaire: objectives and process: *Graciela Malgesini, independent expert consultant.***

**10.50 EUISG Exchange on poverty impact of COVID 19 and policy responses**

* **Introduction then break-out to 3 groups led by Steering Group.**

*Each group to nominate a rapporteur, a staff member will take notes.*

**3 questions:**

**1) What vulnerable groups are worst affected and how?**

**2) What policy actions have your governments taken? Have they been positive/negative for people facing poverty?**

**3) What policy solutions would you propose? EU and national level.**

**11.30 Back to plenary, feedback from rapporteurs from 3 groups**

**11.45 Exchange on policy solutions: national and EU level**

**11.55 Wrapping up and reminder of next steps: Sian Jones and Graciela Malgesini, EAPN ES/Co-chair EUISG**

**Participants**

*National Networks*: Judith Tobac, Belgium, Iva Kuchynkova, Czech Republic, Malte Wingender, Denmark, Mart-Peeter Erss, Estonia, Anna Järvinen, Finland, Jeanne Dietrich, France, Jürgen Schneider, Germany, Dina Vardamaratou, Greece, Krisztina Jasz, Hungary, Laufey Olafsdottir, Iceland, Paul Ginnell & Irene Byrne , Ireland, Rimgaile Matulionyte, Lithuania, Elina Fogele, Latvia, André Bonello, Malta, Sonja Leemkuil & Laurens, Netherlands, Olav Strommen, Norway, Ryszard Szarfenberg, Poland, Paula Cruz, Portugal, Anna Szuhova, Slovakia, Marija Babovic, Serbia, Graciela Malgesini, Spain, Lena Huss, Sweden, Katherine Duffy, UK

*European Organisation*s: Philippe Seidel, AGE, Fran McDonnell, IFSW

*Guest speaker*: Katalin Szatmari, DG EMPL

*EAPN Staff:* Sian Jones, Rebecca Lee, Mathias Maucher, Magda Tancau

*Apologies*: Aleksandra Zivkovic, Croatia, Michalis Rossis, Cyprus, Maya Staleska, North Macedonia, Ziva Humer, Slovenia

**Welcome/Introduction/objectives of webinar**

Sian welcomed the participants to the second EU ISG Webinar “COVID19 and policy responses: What impact on poverty and social exclusion?” She presented the three main objectives for the webinar (as set out on top of agenda) and went through the agenda, mentioning the three presentations foreseen. Sian introduced the purpose and functioning of the break-out sessions and referred to the questions to be discussed, highlighting that the floor then will be entirely to EAPN members to share information on three questions prepared. The National Networks and EOs can in addition also send written replies to these questions. They will anyway soon receive a more detailed questionnaire as the basis for the EAPN Study on the impact of COVID19 on people experiencing poverty and vulnerability which will be presented at the EAPN Policy Conference.

**EAPN action so far: Presentation [add link] of EAPN Statement, EAPN letter and EAPN webpage**

To set the scene for the webinar and to recall EAPN’s action so far, Mathias presented the main points of the [EAPN Statement on COVID19](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EAPN-EAPN-Statement-on-Covid-19-4163.pdf) issued on 17 March (and based on input received by EAPN Spain, EAPN Austria, AGE and FEANTSA) and of an [EAPN Letter](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EAPN-2020-EAPN-open-letter-to-EU-leaders-on-COVID19_-4174.pdf) of 24 March addressed to the Heads of States and Governments ahead of a European Council. He also informed on a [dedicated webpage](https://www.eapn.eu/members-covid-19/) on COVID 19 on EAPN’s website, showcasing the work, initiatives and the policy work of EAPN members and of other partner organisations which is “work in progress”.

**Presentation [add link] Katalin Szatmari, DG EMPL “EU Social Response to COVID 19” and Q&A**

Katalin Szatmari, DG EMPL, gave an overview on EU action so far to mitigate the economic, public health and social effects of the COVID19 pandemic.

She first presented short term actions in the field of health care and prevention which comprise direct support to the EU healthcare sector, medical guidance for the Member States, a coordination on the availability of personal protective equipment and the provision of protective and hygienic products through FEAD.

Katalin then went through a number of employment-related actions focusing on measures to protect jobs and income, such as short time working arrangements and payments, special unemployment benefits, expanded sickness benefits, specific support measures and in some countries temporarily higher wages or one-off payments for critical staff like doctors or elderly care workers and other measures to support them to reach their workplace, sometimes also across national borders.

She finally elaborated on already decided or planned measures or programmes of financial support to enterprises and member states. As already welcomed in the EAPN Letter she informed about moreflexibility as to the EU budgetary rules to help national governments to financially support their healthcare systems by invoking the “general escape clause” of the Stability and Growth Pact. Katalin also informed about the main elements of the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative. It deals with extended possibilities to use the EU Cohesion Funds, including the ESF, and an up to 100% financing rate by the EU for measures to fight the crisis (i.e. full funding, no longer co-funding). The rules in the FEAD Regulation to obtain support to most deprived and homeless persons have also already been [adapted](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=COM:2020:141:FIN&qid=1585827604222&from=EN). More information is also contained in the article [“Coronavirus: the FEAD to continue supporting people in need”](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9638&furtherNews=yes) published on 21 April in the DG EMPL “Social Europe” e-newsletter. She also sketched out the main objectives and target groups of the new initiative SURE (Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency), a macroeconomic stabiliser tool, whichhelps MS to cover costs directly related to the creation or extension of national short time work schemes or similar measures by providing employees with income support for the hours not worked, also covering self-employed workers and workers with atypical contracts.

Katalin ended her presentation with an outlook on additional challenges ahead, beyond the sanitary crisis, such as long-term impacts of the lockdown measures on people and the economy, with a focus on poor and vulnerable people. The EC expects further divergences among regions, growing income and social inequalities and a heavy impact on many self-employed workers, on atypical workers and on undeclared workers. She highlighted the need to operate the recovery with adequate financial instruments and a new adequate European budget to support the many investments needed, including social investments, in particular into skills and adequate social protection.

Sian informed the participants that the EAPN Policy Team would put together a briefing on EU-level support measures, also assessing them on their relevance and effectiveness to address specific needs for support of poor and vulnerable persons.

**Questions**:

* A first question focussed on what was the current and future EU approach to address and overcome the impacts of COVID19 also comprising measures in the field of internal market, cross-border mobility, but also the main orientation of macro-economic and social policies? (Mart-Peeter, EAPN Estonia).
* Two questions focused on FEAD and ESF, more precisely on changes foreseen in the form of support provided by FEAD, concretely from paper to digital vouchers (Judith, EAPN Belgium) and on the information already shared with the relevant national agencies and administrations related to ESF and by them with the beneficiary organisations on the ground (Graciela, EAPN Spain).
* A fourth and fifth question raised the point that a lot of focus and support (and understandably so) have been geared towards hospitals and medical treatment whereas it has already become clear that a lot of needs already exist and will even become more urgent in elderly care homes and home care services. Does the EC insofar foresee specific initiatives also in the field of elderly care? The COVID19 pandemic also exposes health problems in terms of diabetes, obesity, cardio-vascular diseases which increase the vulnerability to the COVID19 virus. Would the EC therefore plan a refocus of policies and initiatives on preventive health action in order to increase the resilience of everyone? (Philippe, AGE). (Fran, IFSW) deplored the division between health/social care and highlighted the recent problems for workers in elderly care to have quick access to appropriate protective equipment, she wanted to know if the EC would push policies and initiatives to better integrate health and social services and to basically seem them both socially and economically as one broader system in the future.

The bullet points below summarise Katalin Szatmari’s answers in reply to questions from members:

* In addition to the [EU Roadmap for Recovery](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43384/roadmap-for-recovery-final-21-04-2020.pdf) and an [Joint EU Roadmap towards lifting COVID19 containment measures](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication_-_a_european_roadmap_to_lifting_coronavirus_containment_measures_0.pdf) referred to by EAPN IE, EU is expected to publish on 29 April a roadmap with measures on how to overcome the lock-down measures and to overcome the pandemic. This should cover measures in the field of economic recovery, welfare systems, Green Deal and Digital Agenda (reaction to EAPN EE and UK). The EC has limited powers to intervene, as the main burden falls on individual member states.
* Changes in FEAD programmes and regulation have been adopted and communicated to competent national agency - this includes the possibility of issuing paper and digital vouchers to buy food in shops, as foodbanks and other meal services for poor people are being closed down. (reaction to EAPN BE) Networks need to follow up with these agencies to check they are implementing them. (reaction to EAPN ES).
* It is correct that EU measures up to now have mainly focused on health care and hospital services, but EC are supporting measures looking at a better integration of health and social care systems (reaction to AGE and IFSW). Katalin also agreed with the need to shift more to preventive measures in (public) health with the aim to reduce health problems and risks to which more vulnerable groups are more (or more severely) exposed, as also shown by the COVID pandemic (reaction to AGE).
* There is also a need to improve the resilience of income systems, comprising income from employment (salaries/wages), minimum income and income from undeclared work (with undeclared workers being another generally particular vulnerable group). It is true that the initiatives, programmes and adaptation of existing measures taken up to now at EU level did not have a strong focus on specific needs or targeted support of poor people and vulnerable groups, with the exception of the changes decided in the implementation of FEAD.

**Presentation [add link] of EAPN Survey/Questionnaire: objectives and process**

Graciela shortly presented the objectives, main contents and timeline for the EAPN survey to be addressed to EU ISG members. She will elaborate a questionnaire, with slightly different versions for the National Networks and for the EOs, to be circulated to EAPN members on 4 May. The (draft) report on the impact of COVID19 on people experiencing poverty and vulnerability which will underpin EAPN’s policy and advocacy work will be presented at the EAPN Policy Conference (14 July tbc). The overarching topic for this event will be the impacts of the COVID19 pandemic and policy solutions at national and European level to address them, reinforcing need for long-term effective anti-poverty strategy.

**EUISG Exchange on poverty impact of COVID 19 and policy responses**

The colleagues were asked to exchange on the following three questions in three break-out sessions:

1) *What vulnerable groups are worst affected and how by the COVID19 pandemic?*

*2) What policy actions have your governments taken? Have they been positive/negative for people facing poverty?*

*3) What policy solutions would you propose? EU and national level.*

The replies of the EAPN members to these three questions are contained in the notes for the three break-out sessions – break out session 1 **[add link]**, break-out session 2 **[add link]**, break-out session 3 **[add link]** - and in a file containing the messages posted to the chat **[add link]** during the webinar.

**Reporting back from break-out sessions 1, 2 and 3**

Sian chaired the report back from the break-out sessions. Paul, EAPN Ireland, Philippe, AGE and Marija, EAPN Serbia, highlighted the following key points from their break-out sessions respectively. Rapporteurs were asked to give overall messages, and to build on each others inputs

Paul/Group 1

* It is important to prioritize our messages, or the impact is reduced.
* Financial support is essential, there needs to be more focus on higher unemployment benefit and coverage for those in precarious jobs, as well as adequate minimum income.
* Investment in social services and public services, including health, must be a priority
* A poverty, gender and distributional impact assessment needs to be done to adequately assess the longer term social and economic impact.
* Positive measures from governments have included extra support, flexible working subsidies, voucher schemes and tax subsidies.
* But some of the normal support measures are not working well eg food banks, not getting supplies or volunteers to cope with increased demands

Philippe/Group 2

* The key target groups are very common in all MS – but some are impacted more from the virus itself and others from the policy measures taken, including lock-down. Most were highlighted in the EAPN statement: older people, children: (in overcrowded/poor homes, the suffering the digital divide, loss of school meals), the homeless, migrants, Roma – particularly those crowded into hostels acting as vectors. People working in precarious jobs who are dismissed, with no unemployment benefits, as well as those in undeclared jobs. Women face a triple burden. Poverty is precondition, that influences the extent and severity of the health and social/economic impact. What happens afterwards, coping with the 2nd wave is also a concern.
* Some government actions have been beneficial but are creating a 2-tier system for those already receiving benefits. There is a challenge for the calculation of social benefits and their possible increase due to COVID19: If social benefits already are low and non-adequate, also an increase of one-off payments that are not effective to reduce poverty.
* NGO’s are under pressure and their funding is at risk, both from government subsidies, but also from donations.
* Risk of future age discriminations (e.g. in relation to prolonged confinement or isolation measures, when it comes to access to intensive beds/treatments or respirators, to going back to the labour market) and the risk of violation of human rights.

Marija/Group 3

* The impacts of COVID19 pandemic are strongly related to inequality. In particular, the effectiveness of welfare state arrangements /social protection systems in reducing poverty before the crisis (adequacy, coverage, enabling character of benefits, etc.) In the countries with less adequate systems there is a particular need to focus on real income situation of poor and vulnerable people. Countries which have stronger welfare states have protected people better.
* The threat of authoritarian regimes taking advantage of the COVID19 crisis to close down democracy and attacks on rights of individuals and NGOs is a real one. The countries with stronger democracies are also generally also the ones with stronger social protection systems.
* Additional key factors impacting on social and economic consequences of COVID19: quality and space of housing, relative share of collective accommodation (for children, elderly persons, persons with a disability, etc.), availability of quality and affordable day care places for these groups, access (or not) to digital technology.
* Important to focus on specific needs and support for children and adolescents in child and youth welfare institutions, educational needs of children living in poorer and more vulnerable households (risk of lower educational attainments) and on countermeasures and adequate support to address domestic violence.

**Exchange on policy solutions: national and EU level**

In the exchange of policy solutions on national and EU-level the following points were put forward:

* In the European Semester it is important to adapt NRP and CSR to better address the impact of COVID19 epidemic. Networks should be putting pressure on their governments particularly regarding the NRP which have to be submitted at the end of April.
* The COVID19 crisis strengthens the arguments to put poverty reduction at the centre of a Post 2020 strategy and at the heart of exit strategies.
* Need to urgently influence/discuss exit strategies, to mitigate impact on people experiencing poverty and to ensure that austerity is not the ‘go-to’ solution to claw back the deficits/public debt at the expense of the poor.
* The issue of age discrimination/where choices have been made to ‘sacrifice’ older people’s human rights is a key concern. The respect for rights has to be for all ages. Young people are also paying a high price, as they get less direct support, are often in precarious jobs and their futures are being mortgaged.

**Wrapping up and reminder of next steps**

Sian thanked everybody for the active participation. She underlined the vital work that EAPN members were doing in their own networks: in providing direct services and advocacy to hold governments to account. EAPN would need to monitor both the impact of COVID19 virus itself highlighting inequality, but also the policies being taken, including lockdown. EAPN would focus on effective short-term and long-term measures. It was clear that protecting people’s rights now must be the central focus. For example: money should be paid directly into people’s pockets with unemployment benefits/ minimum income or other direct subsidies at increased levels to deal with higher costs and challenges. In the longer-term, the positive measures must be built on to consolidate welfare states, minimum income and social protection systems and reinforce quality employment – as part of an integrated antipoverty strategy. She confirmed the follow-up action on the Study and informed that a short report from the webinar and all presentations would be circulated shortly.