

In its [reply](#) to the European Commission, EAPN calls for a high-profile EPSR Action Plan proposing soft and hard law measures, with a clear timetable at EU and national level, mapping progress towards obligatory social rights that guarantee basic living standards for all EU residents. The Action Plan should include an EU strategy to fight poverty as the overarching goal and framework and an ambitious poverty target.

Pre-conditions for a successful Action Plan:

1. The EU must support **short-term [responses to the COVID-19 pandemic](#)** and ensure they prevent increases and lead to long-term reductions in poverty and inequality.
2. **The strategy must be set within a [coherent post 2020/Europe 2030 strategy](#)** and a Social and Green Deal underpinning the [exit strategies from COVID-19](#).
3. **An [EU integrated strategy to fight poverty](#) must form the overarching goal and framework for the Action Plan.** This should be based on Active Inclusion refocused to guarantee rights to adequate income (through quality jobs and/or income support) and quality essential services for all groups.
4. **This strategy must adopt an [ambitious EU target to end poverty](#)** in all its forms (SDG1), through a 50% target (ARPE) and an additional indicator/target to cover extreme poverty including a concrete measurement of homelessness, based on the [ETHOS](#) framework.
5. **The EU needs obligatory Social Rights!** A starting point must be guaranteeing an [adequate income](#) for all in the EU. An [EU framework Directive](#) to [guarantee adequate, accessible and enabling minimum income](#) and an EU framework for minimum/living wages is a priority, particularly to [effectively address the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic](#).
6. **EU soft instruments must be “social rights- and poverty-proofed”:** The [European Semester must become more social](#). EU funds need to be effectively mobilised to support social rights that reduce poverty linked to the European Semester.
7. EU-level and national policies and regulation for a [transition to a green and climate-friendly economy](#) have to undergo a **systematic ex-ante social and distributional impact assessment, including on income distribution and income inequalities**. This is to check their impact on the income also of poor/low-income households to ensure that they are not worse off and that social/income inequalities are not increasing.
8. **People must be put at the heart** – empowering people to contribute to solutions, holding governments to account – with obligatory guidelines for their participation and the [meaningful, structured and regular involvement of civil society organisations in the European Semester](#), in other EU and national decision-making processes. This was one of the key demands of the European [Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty 2019](#).

EAPN highlights 5 EPSR principles as priorities, grouped with other relevant principles and underpinned by the SDGs, to be implemented through EU hard law and soft instruments. EAPN's overriding priority is the right to an **adequate income (minimum income/social protection and minimum/living wage) and access to universal public and essential services** – including housing, health, care, child care/early learning, energy – as the basis for an effective anti-poverty strategy. **Other key proposals are elaborated on below:**

[Principle 14: Minimum Income. SDG 1](#)

Key hard law priority is an EU Framework Directive (legal base: TFEU (art 153,1,h) to guarantee an adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income, based on common definitions including adequacy linked to the 60% AROP poverty threshold and underpinned by national reference budgets.

Soft Instruments: MI must be a key element of an integrated antipoverty strategy, based on Active Inclusion and supported through the European Semester with increased CSRs as a trigger for policy actions and sanctions where there are inadequate levels or progress on adequacy, coverage and enabling support. Further work is needed on - agreeing common definitions of all elements, new research on transitions, take-up and negative impacts of conditionality. A requirement to increase financing of MI schemes through increased and more progressive tax collection, with targeted support from EU funds backing effective national systems is key.

[Principle 12: Social Protection. SDG 1 and 10](#)

Hard Law: EAPN strongly backs the need for a Framework Directive to guarantee access to social protection. We support the ETUC view that an impact assessment should be carried out in 4 years' time, involving the social partners, as well as civil society organizations particularly those working with low-paid and vulnerable workers to ascertain whether a further legal instrument is needed. The social and economic impact of COVID-19 only underlines the urgent need to guarantee social protection to all regardless of employment status.

Soft Instruments: The Council Recommendation on Access to Social Protection needs to be implemented prioritizing the extension of mandatory and effective coverage, adequate of benefits for all workers, regardless of employment status. This must be monitored rigorously through the European Semester, including coherence with macroeconomic CSRs, increased support for adequacy of financing of social protection - at least at 35% of GDP, financed through better and more progressive tax collection.

[Principle 6: Fair Wages, connected to Principles 3, 4, 5 and 8 - SDG 8](#)

Hard law: Propose an EU obligatory framework establishing minimum living wages, which allows for a decent standard of living for workers and their families, benchmarked at 60% of median wage contextualized with reference budgets. Require statutory minimum wages, where none exist and support collective bargaining as a pre-requisite. Support an EU Directive on gender pay gap and to require pay transparency.

Soft Instruments: Prioritize quality employment principles and indicators to capture adequacy of wages, benchmarked to the 60% of median wage. Through the European Semester adopt a fair-wage/decent work priority for CSRs including: increased analysis of in-work poverty related to gender and other groups,

supporting increased employment security/employment status for all workers, collective bargaining and trade union membership and person-centred supportive active inclusion. Improve consultation with people facing in-work poverty and NGOs supporting them in policy dialogue processes.

[Principle 20: Access to Essential Services, connected to Principles 19, 16, 18, 11 – SDG 1, 3, 6, 7, 10 and 11](#)

Hard Law: EAPN continues to support the need for an EU Directive to protect universal public services, as a public good, to avoid an increasingly marketized, profit-driven model. The absence of any obligatory right to housing is a major weakness in the EU social model. The right to housing should be enforced regardless of residence status, to ensure access to rights for migrants, homeless people and other excluded.

Soft Instruments: the European Semester needs to be rebalanced towards ensuring universal access to accessible, affordable, quality services in all areas, rather than viewed predominantly as a cost and a target for restructuring.

In the area of **Energy Poverty:** The European Green Deal/ Just Transition must assert the right to affordable, clean energy for all and develop obligatory EU guidelines to ensure rights based approaches in the national climate and energy plans based on the 3 pillar approach (adequate income, reducing consumption/energy efficiency and fair prices). Further EU action is needed to ban disconnections, stop the phasing out of regulated prices in the energy sector for domestic households, support social tariffs for vulnerable customers, prioritising EU Invest financing to support energy efficiency and decent housing, including expansion of social housing measures targeting low income households ensuring no additional costs in housing or bills.

Housing: The European Semester should ensure that the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) treat housing as a social right, rather than primarily as a market for growth. It must address speculation and support the increase of adequate and affordable housing for low income groups, including through significant investment in social housing. EU funds including ESF, ERDF and EU Invest should support the growth of new housing provision including local/regional social housing cooperatives owned by people themselves. The EU should support regulation of rents particularly where there is evidence of market failure. Strong backing must be given to the prevention of evictions, the promotion of national cross-sectoral strategies to tackle homelessness, investing in Housing First strategies and ensuring a stop to criminalisation of the homeless. Progress should be made on a common EU definition and indicator for 'affordable' housing costs of 25% of personal budgets, underpinned by EU minimum quality standards on housing. A concrete EU indicator is needed to measure homelessness, covering the widest scope of homelessness defined by the [ETHOS](#) framework (See [FEANTSA](#), from rough sleeping to those in emergency accommodation, overcrowded housing, "hidden homelessness", etc.). The participation of people facing homelessness and housing exclusion is crucial to achieve viable policy solutions in national and EU decision-making processes, together with the NGOs that support them.

Health and Care: The EU should create an adequate framework to guarantee the right to universal, affordable, quality health and social care services for all, covering all essential health and care services (including prevention, primary, community, hospital and specialist care, dental, mental health, social and long-term care and the cost of medicines). The Semester should give specific priority to defending universal provision as a public good and ensuring equal access for all groups/also rural/city divide. An independent assessment should

be carried out of the impact of privatisation and liberalisation and recommendations made to support the financing of universal public systems through either progressive tax systems or national health insurance schemes where all pay into the system according to their means, supported by EU macroeconomic policy, rather than a focus on cost-saving efficiencies. Poverty and social exclusion must be recognized as major social determinants of health inequality which leads to long-term social and economic costs. Recommendations must be made to support investment to ensure universal coverage of health and care services, as well as targeted action to compensate for inequalities for specific groups. The users (patients, people facing poverty and social exclusion and those currently unable to access health services) must be made key actors in the design, monitoring and support in delivery, particularly through the European Semester.

Child poverty: As partners to the [Investing in Children Alliance joint statement](#), [EAPN](#) supports the implementation of the Child Guarantee, with a Council Recommendation, reinforcing the Investing in Children Commission Recommendation (2013), recognizing the multidimensionality of poverty and framing the Recommendation within an integrated antipoverty approach tackling the needs of children and their carers/parents: 1) Access to adequate resources and benefits. 2) Access to affordable, quality and inclusive services, 3) Children's right to participate in cultural and recreational activities and in decisions made for their lives). Ensuring that the Council Recommendation has a clear implementation plan to ensure effective monitoring and is properly financed and interconnected to other EU financial instruments beyond ESF+.

Principle 1: Education, Training and Life-long learning- SDG 4

Soft Instruments: The [right to universal, quality, affordable and inclusive education, VET and LLL throughout the life course](#), must be systematically implemented in the European Semester, prioritising CSRs for those MS which have made low progress or have major problems with ensuring equal treatment for poor, or excluded groups. Dedicated funding to support investments in more inclusive education systems, informal and non-formal education in particular for NEETs and adult learners, accessibility, awareness raising and anti-discrimination measures must be included in the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) and more specifically in the ESF+. Redefine higher targets for early school leavers and NEETs, including quality of support and ensure adequate investment to meet the needs of those requiring support with basic literacy and numeracy. Update an EU-wide inventory of existing systems and procedures to validate non-formal education, training and life skills as the basis to elaborate recommendations to EU MS. Better target EU funds to support lifelong learning from a broader perspective than labour market needs, for example through implementing enabling conditionalities in the European Social Fund/ESF+ prioritising funding aimed at those with the lowest level of educational attainment, in adult literacy, as well as those from low income families or suffering from discrimination. Expand use of EU funding from ESF+ to co-finance language and integration courses for migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers and support measures for the educational attainment and social inclusion of Roma children and to overcome segregation and discrimination. Ensure the active participation of children, youth and adults in educational systems and services as well as in dialogue processes to develop and monitor educational and training policies.