

EAPN Capacity Building Webinar for national networks and European organizations

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

19 November 2020, 14:30-17:00

EAPN Portugal

Presentations of promising practices of the European Semester work by 3 National Networks:

1) In which European Semester processes and with whom in your governments or in the European Commission do you engage?

EAPN Portugal follows the European semester process engaging at European level with EAPN Europe. Analysis of the Country Report; of the National Reform Program, Country Specific recommendations, the European Pillar of Social Rights are perhaps the key elements of this process that we try to follow and influence.

Looking to last year and also previous years we had been invited for some meetings with the European semester office in Portugal. Sometimes only to participate, other times to give inputs, especially with Country Desks in the preparation of the Country Reports. This year we were directly invited by the office to participate in the webinar with Commissioner Schmit on the European Pillar of Social Rights. We had also opportunity in previous years to participate in meetings with the Commission, through EAPN Europe, and to assess the Country Report and give feedback on the national situation.

At the national level the situation is a little bit different because at national level we need to be more proactive because there is no specific moments to be engage for example in the design of the National Reform Program. Our current contact is with the Ministry of Employment and social affairs but we make also approaches to the Prime Minister, the President and the Presidency and State Ministry (in which is included some key state secretary important for our work like the state secretary for citizenship and equality).

2) How do you use the work on the European Semester to influence national policies?

How we are more proactive and use the work of the semester to influence national policies? What we do?

We can start with the basic action to a more complex/difficult approach:

- * send the assessment reports of EAPN Europe in which we include our own assessment and views;
- * translate some of the information to portuguese and send our views to key stakeholders;
- * request meetings and audiences to discuss key subjects and in these meetings we include also our assessment work of the semester;
- * produce and disseminate our own [national positions](#) on key subjects in which we include our own views of the country report, the EPSR and so on;
- * produce and disseminate [policy briefings](#) on the work developed at European level;
- * produce and disseminate our [national report on poverty data](#) (data that we collect form different sources) and produce and disseminate the [poverty watch](#). In terms of political lobby the poverty watch is more important because in here we present a picture of the situation of poverty at national level, but we also present some messages from people experiencing poverty and a set of recommendations.

But we do other things that is important for our lobby work that is inform our members - other NGOs - and also other stakeholders - like public entities - and also people experiencing poverty about this process, some of the key documents and the European pillar of social rights (since it was launched in 2017). This is important because how can we ask any entity/civil society organisation to participate in these processes and influence national policies if people are not informed; if these processes are complex and not very friendly.

3) What worked well and what did not work/could not be achieved in recent years – and why?

We are still “fighting” for a real platform for the participation of Civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty.

Recently we have seen our efforts to define a national strategy to fight against poverty come to succeed, since the strategy is already being designed and we are one of the entities involved. We are trying to include into this strategy a methodology/mechanis to promote civil society and people expiring poverty engagement and participation.

I must admit that for the [Recovery and Resilient Plan](#) the Government requested to an external expert to produce a first key report on the current and future situation of

Portugal and our main challenges. Then they launched a public consultation on this: what are the main priorities for Portugal in key areas like fight poverty. Then they presented another report with the results of the public consultation and then a public presentation the draft of the Plan. This was important to prepare the recovery and resilient plan. In a way to make this plan reflect some concerns from the ground.

But for example, sometimes these processes (participation processes) are not very transparent and do not occur in time and with the necessary time. For example, the public consultation on the European pillar of social rights: only now at national level is being promoted some thematic consultation moments, and directly involving the public. It is important, yes, but the consultation process is finalizing at European level.

In summary:

* we think that we need a real platform for the participation of civil society organizations and people experiencing poverty. Something that could give space for participation, but also to receive feedback of the results and impact of that participation;

* NGO's can have a significant role to improve the participation of people experiencing poverty but for that they also need financing. EAPN Portugal has a budget that allow us to do this work. If this was not the case it would be impossible for us to develop the work that we do with citizens.

* It's important to have clear guidelines to Member states on how to promote participation in these processes and reflect this work in the processes. What I mean is: we have now the recovery plan the member states must show how they are involving civil society organizations***; the same for the action plan of the EPSR and the semester.

*** In the RRP it's included a chapter dedicated to *Governance and Reporting*. In terms of political coordination there will be a steering committee chaired by the Prime Minister and in terms of the technical and management coordination the Financial Ministry will have a key role. In the level of monitoring, there will be a national commission "chaired by an independent person and it will have a plural constitution, in order to guarantee an adequate sectorial and territorial representation". In this national commission it's represented some key organizations of the social economy like Union of Mercies, Union of Mutualities; National Confederation of Social Solidarity Institutions. This is important but we must also say that these entities represent a part of the social sector, a part of social intervention,

which refers to the provision of services such as homes, day care centers, childhood homes, etc. There is a whole other dimension related to the fight against poverty and even with the local development that is being discovered and that we still don't know if they will be able to participate in this monitoring at any time.

In terms of reporting the management of the plan will be centralized but its implementation will be, when possible, decentralized in terms of territory. They clearly say that local authorities / municipalities will have a role in this decentralization but in what concerns housing and landscape modification. The report will be semiannual and will also obey to a set of indicators agreed with the Commission.