

## Joint SPC & EMCO meeting

15<sup>th</sup> of May 2020

**Key messages from several Social Platform members on the social and employment impact of COVID-19 and the need for an ambitious post-2020 strategy to ensure recovery**

### European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)

#### Key messages on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on our constituencies

1. **People in poverty and social exclusion are most severely hit by COVID-19, both in terms of existing inequalities in health and access to health services and socio-economic impact.** A distinction must be made between 1) the health impact: particularly as poverty is a key social determinant of health inequalities, and 2) the result of national government policies – particularly the impact of lock-down. The impact is worse for people in low paid, precarious jobs and the unemployed, (single parent) households with children, chronically ill, persons with disabilities, homeless people and migrants. **It is essential to quickly monitor the impact of COVID19 and government policies on poor and excluded groups**, and on the structural causes of poverty. [EAPN has started this and included first information received by its members in the EAPN Assessment of the 2020 Country Reports and Proposals for CSR] The monitoring should include a gender equality/poverty/distributional impact assessment and inform policy guidance. In this context a meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty & NGOs in identifying the impact, the causes and solutions is essential!
2. **Prioritise adequate minimum income and social protection** as essential pre-requisites for enforcing the right to an adequate income, decent and affordable housing and dignified life. MI is particularly essential when people fall outside contribution-based unemployment benefits and are left with no resources. The increasing precariousness of jobs without adequate social protection, leaves people increasingly vulnerable to destitution, without income support. Food banks, are merely a sticking plaster and should not be a substitute for providing people with an adequate income to secure housing, support their families and keep included in society and close the labour market. Minimum income and social protection are essential automatic stabilisers to drive a re-start for an inclusive and sustainable economy.
3. **Protect employment/ prevent precarious work/revalue front-line work:** Commitments must be made to quality jobs, preventing increase of precarious jobs, reinforcing employment protection/rights, including access to social protection regardless of employment status. COVID19 has exposed the reality that front-line essential workers in a range of economic sectors including health, care, household/domestic and retail services are paid the least. Urgent action must be taken to increase wages/ improve working & pay conditions, in these sectors: predominantly impacting on women, migrants, ethnic minorities and other vulnerable workers.

Key messages on the need for and content/structure of a post-2020 strategy that will enable us to ensure recovery in a coherent and effective way

**Introduction/overarching statement on a Post-2020 Strategy:** The Post-2020 Strategy needs to build on the learning of the existing Europe 2020 Strategy and provide a long-term comprehensive, overarching strategy to promote social and sustainable development, with considers the eradication of poverty as a pre-requisite, in line with Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. [More detailed arguments and demands are contained in the EAPN Proposals for a Post-Europe 2020 Strategy “Delivering Agenda 2030 – For People and the Planet”. EAPN’s assessment of the reformed European Semester and proposals for its future design are included in EAPN Reply to the ASGS and the JER 2020 “Working for a Green and Social Deal that ends poverty!”] The European Green Deal is one pillar, but should be part of an integrated approach – a social and green deal. This is particularly essential in the light of the devastating social and economic impact of the COVID19 epidemic.

1. **Give priority to poverty reduction, implementing social rights and SDGs, adopting an ambitious EU poverty target (50% AROPE) and eradicate extreme poverty and prioritising a rights-based EU integrated anti-poverty strategy** ensuring access to quality public and essential services, adequate minimum income and social protection and quality jobs – **and support additional integrated strategies for key at-risk groups**, such as children and their families (Investing in Children underpinning a Child Guarantee Council Recommendation), low-wage earners/those in precarious jobs, persons with disabilities, single parents, homeless persons, migrants and ethnic minorities including Roma and Travellers.
2. **Improve the adequacy and coverage of minimum income and social protection and reinforce quality public health and social care services:** The COVID19 crisis has highlighted the insufficiencies of our universal health care systems and social services. Short term investment and support to deal more effectively with the current crisis must be underpinned by a commitment to increase funding of universal, quality public health and care services, reducing health inequalities and ensuring nobody is left behind. **As integral part of comprehensive, rights-based and universal social protection schemes, minimum income schemes which are adequate, accessible and enabling help guaranteeing a minimum standard of living and decent life for all and also enable people to fully participate in society** – all this has become even more important and urgent on the backdrop of the COVID19 pandemic and its impacts.
3. **Ensure that macroeconomic policies, support social rights and reduce poverty and that the poor don’t pay with austerity:** The EU must learn lessons from the 2008 crisis. Ensure that eventual reductions of public debt/ deficit do not impose austerity measures which will increase poverty and undermine a sustainable recovery, also by using the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact. **A commitment to the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs underlines the need to ensure that increased commitment to public services and welfare states are driven by fairer redistributive tax policies.** What is needed is a **massive public investment initiative** to protect people experiencing poverty, strengthen national public health and social protection systems and support the economy through this crisis.

**AGE Platform Europe**

Key messages on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on our constituencies

**Our main concern in the COVID-19 crisis is the denial of human rights to older persons in numerous areas including through age discrimination in various areas: access to health and social care services, risk of abuse and neglect and concerns with the long-term consequences of prolonged social isolation measures targeted towards older persons. These are summarised in our paper on [COVID-19 and human rights](#).**

- 1. During the crisis, older persons have been the group most affected by the health impacts, being much more at risk of complications and fatalities due to multimorbidities that may accumulate with age. According to WHO Europe, “Older adults are at a significantly increased risk of severe disease following infection from COVID-19. This is an important observation for the European Region: of the top 30 countries with the largest percentage of older people, all but one (Japan) are our Member States in Europe. The countries most affected by the pandemic are among them. Over 95% of these deaths occurred in those older than 60 years. More than 50% of all fatalities involved people aged 80 years or older. Reports show that 8 out of 10 deaths are occurring in individuals with at least one comorbidity, in particular those with cardiovascular disease, hypertension and diabetes, but also with a range of other chronic underlying conditions.”<sup>1</sup>**
- 2. Crisis responses have been particularly inadequate in long-term care<sup>2</sup>: in institutional care, a widespread lack of adequate protocols and means for the management of infectious diseases has been observed. There are reports of nursing homes without access to diagnosis or treatment, despite a high prevalence of persons with symptoms. Staff working in care settings have not had access to sufficient personal protective equipment, exposing themselves to high risk of infection and the risk of becoming infection vectors among a particularly vulnerable group; gaps in staff have sometimes resulted in the abandonment of residents, with some reports of older persons being found dead in care homes. In home care, health and social care providers have reduced their services because of lack of protective equipment reduction and reassignment of the available workforce to institutional settings, leading to cases of social isolation, neglect and overburdening of informal carers. Particularly in home care, guidance, protocols and equipment are still largely missing.**
- 3. Being singled out for prolonged confinement in the exit strategies in various countries, older persons are concerned that they might be stigmatised in the aftermath of the crisis. Older persons are concerned about the mental and physical health impact of prolonged confinement and feel they are excluded from contributing to society. The stereotypical image of older persons as frail, a burden and unable to contribute to society might find itself reinforced, while older workers might be unable to find employment because of employers’ concerns about protecting them.**

Key messages on the need for and content/structure of a post-2020 strategy that will ensure recovery in a coherent and effective way

In general, there is a need for a follow-up strategy to Europe 2020 that contains targets and common commitments in all areas of the European Pillar of Social Rights. These targets should be backed-up by accepted indicators that are disaggregated by age and gender.

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1 Cf: World Health Organisation, [Supporting older people during the COVID-19 pandemic is everyone’s business](#). 03/04/2020

2 Cf Dr Hans Kluge, Regional Director for Europe at the World Health Organisation, [Invest in the overlooked and unsung: build sustainable people-centred long-term care in the wake of COVID-19](#), 23/04/2020

1. Initiatives must focus on the realisation of the EPSR principle 18 of the right to long-term care: the crisis has exposed the severe shortcomings in the quality and resources dedicated to long-term care and support and the important lack of coordination between health and social care. Initiatives should address the investment gap into long-term care, thereby increasing the quality of services, ensuring the integration of health and social care as well as providing decent working conditions for professionals.<sup>3</sup> Informal carers should be supported by income and work-life balance measures, access to respite and day care as well as training and exchange with peers. Investment in health promotion and disease prevention, including in well-trained and adequately supported health and care professionals, is crucial to make health and social care systems more resilient to crisis such as this one.<sup>4</sup> These two pillars are also essential to tackling health inequalities which are further exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak, they imply for example to invest in supportive environment and communities empowering older persons in line with the WHO approach of 'health in all policies'<sup>5</sup>. Addressing health inequalities is equally important, specifically the absence of avoidable, unfair or remediable differences among groups of people. Geriatric health and palliative care should be made available more broadly.
2. The impact of the crisis on poverty and social exclusion in all stages of life should be put at the centre of the future post-2020 strategy. This should focus both on the ability to live in dignity and the reduction of inequalities, which risk being exacerbated by the economic and social crisis following the COVID-19-related lockdowns. An approach for this is a European Framework Directive on Minimum Income Schemes, setting a common approach on adequate minimum income levels based on representative reference budgets that take into account the cost of essential goods and service at all stages of life, in line with the EPSR principle on adequate minimum income (principle 14) and on old-age income and pensions (principle 15). The increased cost for some services regarding older persons, such as extra charges for home delivery which is made necessary because of confinement measures, should be covered by these reference budgets.

## European Youth Forum

### Key messages on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on our constituencies

1. COVID-19 will have a big impact on youth unemployment. This is because youth unemployment rises almost twice as fast as the overall unemployment rate during recessions; and young people are often 'first-out' when job losses occur. The youth unemployment rate is already high at 15.2% compared to the overall rate of 6.6% for the EU. Moreover, non-standard workers are more likely to lose their jobs during a recession. 43.8% of young people are in temporary forms of work and 13% work without any contract at all putting them at higher risk of losing their jobs in the coming months and years.
2. The poorest and most marginalised young people, such as those unable to work or study from home, are at risk of long-term suffering. The previous crisis showed that graduating during a recession has significant and persistent negative consequences on lifetime income and career

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3 Cf. AGE Platform Europe, [Residential institutions in the eye of the COVID-10 storm: governments must act quickly to protect residents and personnel](#). Press Release, 16/04/2020

4 Cf. AGE Platform Europe, [Investment in Health For All: the best reward we can give to nurses](#). Press release, 06/04/2020

5 Cf. World Health Organisation, ['What you need to know about Health in All Policies'](#)

prospects. Without targeted support for youth, the NEET rates can be expected to grow in the aftermath of the pandemic with consequences for many years to come.

3. Young people are at greater risk of poverty during the crisis and in its aftermath. They are often unable to access unemployment benefits because of interrupted spells of employment and a lack of work experience after leaving education which limits their contributions to insurance-based systems. They may also be unable to access minimum income schemes until they reach a certain age or receive a reduced amount because of their age. The combined impact of higher unemployment and a lack of access to social protection will leave many young people with insufficient income to afford other basic rights such as housing and food.

#### Policy Response to ensure recovery in a coherent and effective way

1. Create European quality standards for the Youth Guarantee covering all types of offers and support alongside a stronger ESF+ that increases youth guarantee funding from the current €8.8bn. This is necessary to heed the lessons from the 2008 crisis that unemployment should not be addressed by relaxing labour legislation, but instead by investing in quality employment to create long-lasting change that prevents precariousness and poverty.
2. Eliminate age-based discrimination in accessing social protection to ensure groups like young people have equal access.
3. Improve working conditions by updating labour legislation to regulate new forms of work as they arise to prevent the precariousness of non-standard work, guaranteeing workers a living wage through an EU minimum wage framework to alleviate poverty and ensuring everyone has equal access to social protection, including minimum income schemes.

#### **ERGO Network - European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network**

##### Key messages on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on our constituencies

1. The European Union should request Member States, Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries to urgently provide humanitarian relief to counter the disproportionate health, social, and economic impact of the pandemic on Roma communities and other vulnerable groups. Any emergency or recovery plan must address the specific situation of Roma through measures that directly target Roma as marginalized groups, while ensuring that all general measures reach Roma communities. The interventions should be coordinated with the full involvement of national Roma representatives, such as National Roma Contact Points, Roma mediators, and Roma civil society organisations.
2. Governments should ensure that Roma are safe from racist violence and intimidation, rigorously investigating incidents of antigypsyism and police abuse, as well as monitoring and sanctioning the dissemination of misinformation, hate speech and the scapegoating of Roma by the media, politicians or public figures, including the ethnicising of crimes allegedly committed by Roma in the public discourse.
3. A special provision for Roma should be included when implementing European funding instruments for temporary support (SURE, FEAD etc), and the Emergency Fund for Vulnerable Group Rights and Value Programme should be used to support Roma and pro-Roma civil society and mediators to distribute supplies to people in need.

## Key messages on the need for and content/structure of a post-2020 strategy that to ensure recovery in a coherent and effective way

1. The post-2020 “EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Social and Economic Justice and Combating Antigypsyism” must constitute a top priority in the COVID-19 response of the EU, Member States and Enlargement countries, in order to comprehensively address the structural exclusion, inequality, discrimination, and vulnerability of Roma communities in the aftermath of the pandemic. The Framework needs to include minimum standards, common EU indicators, and joint monitoring and implementation through the European Semester.
2. The design and delivery of mainstream initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the New Green Deal and others need to take full account of Roma rights and inclusion, and ensure, not least through the involvement of national and European Roma civil society, that these frameworks don’t leave the Roma behind and explicitly target their specific challenges, in full coherence with the EU Roma Strategic Framework.
3. A new impetus needs to be given to EU Funds (including Enlargement and Neighbourhood Funds) for the next programming period to ensure that initiatives reach Roma communities, through including an explicit Roma investment priority and enabling condition, as well as a dedicated Roma indicator, and through ensuring coherence between Programmes and National Roma Integration Strategies.

### **Eurocarers**

#### Key message on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on our constituencies

#### **Europe cannot afford to leave informal carers on their own at the forefront of the coronavirus battle**

Eurocarers is very concerned about the likely dramatic impact of the epidemic on the already-difficult situation of informal carers across Europe. The prevalence and demographics of both informal care<sup>6</sup> and chronic diseases<sup>7</sup> indeed mean that many informal carers – as the main providers of care to people with chronic conditions or being part of the most-at-risk age group – now find themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation, without adequate support or protective equipment. If their relatives become ill, they will be putting their own health at risk by continuing to provide care for them. Furthermore, the confinement measures, as well as the de-prioritisation of non-essential treatments, is exacerbating their burden and isolation. While in many cases they serve as the last resort safety net for the person they care for, the risk of becoming ill and therefore unable to ensure the continuity of care is also a significant stress factor for them.

Furthermore, the strict confinement measures in place across Europe and the risk of healthcare system capacity being exceeded further exacerbate carers’ isolation and deprive them from many of the tools at their disposal to maintain an acceptable balance between their social, professional and

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<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that 80% of long-term care in Europe is provided by families, friends and neighbours (Hoffmann and Rodrigues, 2010) and 17% of people aged 65 or more are involved in caregiving activities – EQLS 2016

<sup>7</sup> According to the WHO, two out of three people reaching retirement age will have at least two chronic conditions and chronic conditions currently represent the major share of the burden of disease in Europe and are responsible for 86% of all deaths (CHRODIS)

caregiving responsibilities. This situation intensifies the pre-existing risks to informal carers' physical and mental health.

Against this backdrop, Eurocarers reiterates its call on European governments to address the current critical situation and needs of informal carers. Informal carers are essential to the sustainability of our care systems and ignoring their situation and needs in the context of the current health crisis would amount to no less than a disaster. Their role should be recognised and they should receive adequate support, counselling and training, alongside comprehensive strategies at EU, national and local level.

## **Eurodiaconia**

### Key messages on the impact of COVID-19 and needed policy measures

1. Social investment must be prioritised in the future MFF and throughout the Semester cycle. Social investment makes our societies more resilient, better equips workers for the changing nature of employment, reduces inequalities and helps all citizens reach their full potential. Adequately resourced social protection systems can work as automatic stabilisers and maintain positive effects on demand. Furthermore, improved social cohesion prevents tremendous economic costs of inequalities in the long-run. It also generates social and economic returns as it enables people to be more socially and economically productive.
2. Promote quality employment to ensure sustainable growth, an end to job polarisation and in-work poverty, with particular attention paid to those groups currently under-represented such as Roma and migrant women. Work on developing the Adequate Minimum Income Scheme and Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme must be accelerated. The European Union must also ensure the sustainability of EU-funded programmes such as work integration services and social inclusion actions as they will need to respond and assist people in a changing economic environment.
3. Previous recessions have exacerbated levels of child poverty with long-lasting consequences for children's health, wellbeing, and learning outcomes. Tackling child poverty must be prioritised to ensure that the intergenerational poverty cycle is broken, allowing all citizens to reach their full potential. It is unacceptable that as many as one in four children in the EU (pre-COVID-19) are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

## **ENSIE**

### Socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 on our constituencies

1. Work Integration Social Enterprises, a subset of social economy, are active in sectors such as catering, textile, agriculture, gastronomy, assembling, cleaning, and many more.

The consequences for the WISEs vary from country to country. In Belgium (Flanders) for instance, the drop down in employment is around 90%. The situation in other countries is more or less similar varying from 20-60% (Belgium- Wallonia, Austria, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia, ...). Moreover, drop down in revenue has also been registered in several countries (68 million in AT, 50-100% in DK, 60-70% in HR, 60% in IT, up to 90% in Latvia and 100% in RO) and some WISEs had to close whether temporarily or partially (Belgium – Wallonia 45%, 100% of WISEs are operating partially in Catalonia – Spain as well as in France and Luxembourg - up to 100% and 30%

in Croatia). In some countries such as Latvia two WISEs are at serious risk of going bankrupt and 20% in Spain are facing liquidity issues. This data are the results of two surveys launched at the beginning of the crisis among ENSIE's members in order to analyse with some estimations the impact of COVID-19 on WISEs.

Key messages on the need for and content/structure of a post-2020 strategy that to ensure recovery in a coherent and effective way:

1. Ensure that all national funding and business support schemes to alleviate financial losses due to the crisis are also open and accessible to WISEs, Not-for-Profits and other social economy enterprises.
2. *Develop a **State Aid Framework Flexibility**: allowing **higher thresholds** for the 'de minimis' regime because some MS are providing some additional support under 'de minimis' rather than using the 'temporary aid framework', which means that all **support given today will lead to receiving less support later this year, or in 2021, or in 2022***
3. Ensure that the **most vulnerable are directly concerned** by the European Commission proposal for the **Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative** to **facilitate the deployment** of *"the European Social Fund to temporarily support national short time working schemes which help cushion the impact of the shock"*.