



# Europe 2020 consultation Response from the European Social Network

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## Background

The Europe 2020 Strategy was launched in [March 2010](#) as the EU's strategy for promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Strategy is built around five [headline targets](#) in the areas of employment, research and development, climate and energy, education and the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The Strategy also sets out a series of [flagship initiatives](#) in seven fields considered to be key drivers for growth, namely innovation, the digital economy, employment and youth, industrial policy, poverty reduction and social inclusion promotion and resource efficiency.

The Europe 2020 strategy is implemented and monitored in the context of the European Semester, the yearly cycle of coordination of economic and budgetary policies at EU level. The European Semester involves the annual preparation of National Reform Programmes (NRPs) by the Member States and the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) prepared by the European Commission and endorsed by the national governments. These recommendations should then be taken on board in the Member States' policies and budgets.

In March 2014, the European Commission proposed and national governments agreed to review the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Commission adopted the [Communication](#) "Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" and launched a public consultation seeking the stakeholders' views on the lessons learned and the elements to be taken into account in the further development of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The European Social Network brought together directors and senior professionals working in social services across Europe in the context of ESN's Reference Group on the European Semester to discuss the questions of the public consultation. Their answers form the basis of this response, which you can also find in a longer format here.

### **Taking stock: the Europe 2020 strategy over 2010-2014**

For the European Social Network (ESN) the Europe 2020 strategy means trying to build a fairer, more inclusive, more equal, more prosperous and more sustainable European Union. This would mean mainstreaming the EU's social objectives (particularly the European Treaty's Horizontal Social Clause) at the heart of EU policy making. This means that in developing social policies these should both contribute to combating poverty and social exclusion and investing in building human capital to achieve the goals of smart and sustainable as well as inclusive growth.

The Europe 2020 Strategy has provided some useful opportunities at European level for mutual exchange and learning on social inclusion and wellbeing's promotion. However, throughout the European Semester process, little attention has been given to the social dimension of Europe 2020, which has been overshadowed by the economic and budgetary dimensions.

There has been undoubted learning across countries on key social challenges such as Roma inclusion thanks to [the European Platform for Roma Inclusion](#); on promoting the social

inclusion and well-being of children through the [EC Recommendation Investing in children](#), the work of Networks like European Social Network on [children services](#) and [the European Platform for Investing in Children](#); the promotion of community-based services through the work on [deinstitutionalisation](#); and on ageing thanks to the joint report of the [Commission and the Social Protection Committee on long-term care](#).

These initiatives have been very valuable and influenced thinking over time but there is not a clear causality or even correlation between these activities and Europe 2020. Some of this learning has taken place either in the context of the Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion, at the initiative of individual Commissioners or the request of Member States.

### *Involvement of stakeholders*

From ESN's perspective, one of the weakest areas has been so far the lack of involvement of stakeholders from the local and regional levels. Despite their expertise in regards to social challenges and the needs of users on the ground, public social services directors at local level have not been involved neither in the formulation nor in the implementation of the Strategy. The failure in involving decision-makers in the field of social policy at local level has had an impact on weak implementation, since local and regional authorities deliver many of the policies that are necessary to achieve the Europe 2020 targets.

### *Process*

The EU 2020 objectives respond broadly to the Strategy's vision, but the headline objectives are not sufficient to guide policy as they do not reflect the specificities of each sub-area they should cover. Objectives specify the directions for improvement, but not the means of their achievement. An over-reliance in the objectives of EU 2020 seems to have neglected the means of achieving the objectives. The objectives should only be the starting point of a logical structure for the Strategy with a range of input, intermediate outcome indicators and performance targets, which consider the multidimensional aspects of issues such as employment, social exclusion, inequality and social services' access and quality.

Strategies are likely to be more acceptable and effective if they are generated in partnership with the relevant stakeholders. It is thus preferable to reach agreement on them with relevant stakeholders beforehand. The lack of involvement of relevant stakeholders in the Strategy's formulation may have also been one of the reasons for weak implementation so far.

Objectives are abstract concepts, and it is thus difficult to measure performance against them. Therefore, a greater weight should be given to indicators. Though the EU 2020 defined outcome indicators, it failed to define input indicators to measure expenditure and resources provided, and intermediate outcome indicators, which describe how societies are responding to the Strategy. These would be very helpful in understanding how a change in performance has or has not been obtained. Finally, the Strategy did not include any specific performance targets to measure progress, the degree of achievement so far and linking resources to the achievement of targets. This would have been an effective way of encouraging action and monitoring performance so far. Without these, it is very difficult to accomplish any accurate mid-term review or assessment of the EU 2020 Strategy.

### *Importance of headline targets*

ESN considers that all the targets are important in relation to developing and implementing an integrated and social investment approach. We also stress the importance of focusing on the complementarity of the targets. There is a need to put more emphasis on making incremental changes and measuring progress rather than just focusing on the global targets per se. Such an incremental approach would spell out a step by step process with an action plan including priorities and how to reach them, by when and by whom. Thus there is a need for stronger focus on incremental performance targets, which measure progress and link resources to achieving those incremental changes. However, interconnections between the targets have been largely neglected and more emphasis seems to have been given to achieving economic growth and to the overall employment target than to the other targets. Therefore, the risk would then be that Europe would again resort to unbalanced growth.

The **employment target** and related indicators do not take into account the quality of employment, nor do they refer to the profile of people in employment. Their profile depends greatly on their situation regarding poverty and the labour market, i.e. young adults, inactive or unemployed women, lone parents, or older working age adults out of the labour market are said to be among those facing higher risks of persistent poverty. Our members highlight that disability and mental health issues continue to be invisible in the European Semester despite their social costs and impact on labour market participation. However, employment is not the only improvement that should be made in people's lives. Social public services should be supported in their specific efforts to enhance people's well-being (not only as a means to access employment but also to help people with disabilities or mental health issues to live independently, making sure older people live in dignity and receive adequate care or supporting the better provision of childcare services.

The early **school leaving target** is important, but too narrow. The target related to early school leaving is an appropriate target as it reflects the attention paid to early intervention. However, there is a risk that just focusing on early school leaving will not sufficiently address educational disadvantage which should start addressing access to high quality early childhood education and care for all children with targeted support for those most at risk.

The **poverty and social exclusion target** has been very important symbolically as a statement of intention to build a more inclusive and social Europe. However, ESN members have been concerned about the limited attention given to achieving this target and to how it has been applied. There is a risk of deadweight effect i.e. a risk that only the easiest to reach will be targeted, as opposed to more vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities and/or mental health issues, older people, people from a migrant or ethnic minority background. Moreover, the overall target has lacked credibility as it has not been accompanied by concrete measures/action plans.

### *National targets*

If the Europe 2020 strategy is to be meaningful it would be important that Member States translate the European objectives into their national priorities and policies. This means that national governments should clarify how the NRPs would contribute to achieving the EU level targets on inclusive growth. However, this does not necessarily imply setting a national target, and if a target was set, this must be part of a wider process. Too often it appears that

national targets to monitor the social objectives of the Strategy are set in an arbitrary fashion without a clear analysis of social issues, without involvement of the relevant stakeholders and without an indication of the policies and programmes necessary to achieve them.

The targets would also be greatly enhanced and more credible if they were backed up with intermediate outcome indicators looking at progress made so far and sub-targets for specific groups most at risk of unemployment, early school leaving or poverty: e.g. reducing the number of people in institutional care, reducing very long-term unemployment, reducing unemployment amongst people with disabilities, reducing poverty and social exclusion amongst people with disabilities or people from a migrant background.

## Looking ahead

### *Future challenges*

The increasing social disparities between Member States and between different regions within countries threaten the development of effective public social services and, in turn, undermine the goal of inclusive growth.

Since the beginning of the Europe 2020 Strategy, managers of social services are challenged by the need to manage better due to increasing demands and decreasing resources. In this context, managers of public social services at local level need to find the right balance between the respect of budget requirements and the fulfilment of users' needs. Within ESN, we have been discussing these challenges and possible solutions:

- **The development of evidence-based practice** is key to improve the impact and cost-effectiveness of social and related services.
- **Governance, regional differences and the role of local authorities:** There is a need to invest throughout countries, tackling regional disparities and coordinating all governance levels.
- **Inter-sectorial cooperation:** Better provision of services could be reinforced through enhanced cooperation between sectors, particularly where similar projects may be financed by two different departments; for instance, through a shift to a horizontal, comprehensive and integrated approach.
- **Strengthening institutional and professional capacity:** There is a need to reinvigorate the professionalisation of social services as a driver for reform and a key source of employment.
- Investing in effective **preventative, community based** approaches: The EC Recommendations in the context of the European Semester should find the right balance between efficiency and effectiveness, considering public social services an investment and an opportunity rather than a burden or a cost.
- **Social innovation:** The development of new, comprehensive, cost-effective approaches requiring a better use of human resources, increased participation of users, transformation of how services are run, and increased use of technology.
- **Improving monitoring and evaluation** of social policies and services is key if the EU wants to show the impact of Structural and Investment Funds.

### *Ensure a stronger social dimension in the European Semester*

There needs to be a stronger social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union with the requirement that economic and monetary policies contribute to the achievement of the EU social objectives. Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth will require **investment in human and social capital**, as acknowledged by the European Union notably with the adoption of its 2013 **Social Investment Package** (SIP). Social investment is vital for developing human resource capacity and ensuring more people are able to make an active contribution to a successful economy. A key tool to measure inequality reduction and the improvement of social inclusion is the use of ex ante **social impact assessments** (SIAs) to assess the potential social impact of all policies (especially financial decisions and economic reforms) paired with fiscal consolidation packages.

There needs to be more emphasis in Europe 2020 on a **bottom-up/local perspective**. This requires a link between local and EU levels and means to ensure that local social services are seen as a partner by the European Commission and Member States in the Europe 2020 structures. EC's guidelines and appropriate timeframe on stakeholders' involvement could possibly set the framework for greater involvement of local stakeholders in the implementation.

The Europe 2020 Strategy would become relevant if it more clearly focussed on those who are **most vulnerable and at risk of poverty and social exclusion**. Specific indicators and performance targets for the social inclusion of individual groups; for example, long term unemployed, people with disabilities (employed or unemployed, receiving an allowance), children in care and older people should be developed

Links with other EU policies would be enhanced by adopting a **more coordinated approach** across the Directorate Generals and ensuring that the Strategy is translated into integrated action plans with clear monitoring and evaluation instruments. In regards to resources, it is important to ensure that the programmes approved for **co-funding** with EU Funds are **linked** to achieve the various **Europe 2020 objectives**.

As for the targets, our members stress the importance of putting more emphasis on making incremental changes and **measuring progress** rather than just focusing on the global targets per se. Such an incremental approach would spell out a step by step process, consisting of an action plan that describes how change in the social realm will be achieved. Thus there is a need to have a stronger focus on output indicators, which measure the activities done so far, intermediate outcome indicators, which help to understand better and with more certainty the changes in performance, and incremental performance targets, which allow to measure progress and link resources to achieving those incremental changes.

Overall **targets** need to be **complemented by a broader range of indicators** that explain the reality behind them and allow the development of more effective and targeted policies and strategies. It can be useful to complement overall targets with three other types of targets and objectives: targets and objectives relating to a specific policy domain (e.g. reduction of homelessness, reduction in education disadvantage, reduction in health inequalities), targets and objectives relating to the most vulnerable groups (e.g. people with a disability, long-term unemployed, homeless), and process targets or objectives aimed at

improving services in specific areas (e.g. increased access to early childcare, increased provision of social and care services).

*What would be best done...*

*...by the EU*

In order to implement these approaches in the European Semester process, the emphasis at EU level should be on:

- Link EU policies through a coordinated approach across the Directorate Generals and ensure that the Strategy is translated into integrated action plans with clear monitoring and evaluation instruments.
- Link the programmes approved for co-funding with EU Funds to achieve the Europe 2020's objectives.
- Develop a set of outcome indicators beyond employment, which are more relevant for the field of social policies and specific risk groups
- Provide guidelines for Member States to involve relevant stakeholders, including local public social services, in the European Semester process and monitor and evaluate the process.
- Monitor and report progress and ensure that relevant and timely data is available for all aspects of the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- Make strong and balanced recommendations taking account of "sustainability and social inclusion" considerations to Member States where they are falling short of achieving the Europe 2020 objectives
- Facilitate the exchange of learning and best practice focusing on the development of effective community based, person-centred services.

*...by Member States*

- Develop integrated and coherent strategies, particularly in regards to the European Recommendations on "active inclusion" and "investing in children"
- Ensure effective delivery through stronger links between national and regional/local levels.
- Mobilising and involving all relevant stakeholders, including local public social services, in the development, implementation and monitoring of Europe 2020 actions according to specific guidelines.
- Providing political leadership to promote the Europe 2020 Strategy and mainstreaming its objectives in political debate and policy making.
- Undertake ex ante social impact assessments (SIAs) to assess the potential social impact of all policies (especially financial decisions and economic reforms).

*Most appropriate joint instruments to achieve the EU 2020*

- **Integrated and coherent strategies at national level**, particularly in regards to the European Recommendations on **active inclusion** and **investing in children**.
- The EU and Member States could work together to establish **minimum standards in social services**, which all Member States should work towards. A revision of the **quality framework for social services** would be useful as a reference point for

public authorities developing tools for the evaluation and improvement of social services.

- A focus on **working in partnership** across sectors and government levels is key to foster social inclusion.
- **Social impact assessments** should be used as a way of mainstreaming the inclusive growth dimension across all other policy areas.
- There should be more emphasis in delivering the Europe 2020 Strategy through **social innovation and social investment** recognising social services as a productive part of our society and the importance of evidence-based practice.
- Programmes' **monitoring and evaluation** should be improved. Specific indicators and performance targets for the social inclusion of individual groups; for example, long term unemployed (access to targeted services, activation measures and adequate income), people with disabilities (employed or unemployed, receiving an allowance), older people (access to services) or children in care should be developed.
- There should be more "social inclusion" **Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)** highlighting the importance of developing effective and accessible public social services.
- EC's **guidelines on stakeholders' involvement** could possibly set the framework for greater involvement of local stakeholders in the implementation of the Strategy.