



EMIN2 FINAL REPORT

Guaranteed Minimum Income Nobody deserves less, everybody benefits

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EMIN
EUROPEAN MINIMUM INCOME NETWORK

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What is EMIN?

The European Minimum Income Network (EMIN) is an informal Network of organisations and individuals committed to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes. The organisations involved include the relevant public authorities, service providers, social partners, academics, policy makers at different levels, NGOs, and fosters the involvement of people who benefit or could benefit from minimum income support.

EMIN is organised at EU and national levels, in all the Member States of the European Union and also in Iceland, Norway, Macedonia (FYROM) and Serbia.

EMIN is coordinated by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN). More information on EMIN can be found at www.emin-eu.net

What is this final Report?

This EU final report builds on the achievements in the EMIN2 project, through the policy dialogues at EU and at national level, the peer reviews and the awareness-raising campaigns, especially the bus journey. Reports of the 3 peer reviews on coverage and take-up, on the use of reference budgets and on active inclusion can be found on www.emin-eu.net (EMIN Publications). A blog of the activities during the bus trip can be found on www.eminbus.eu.

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The information contained in this report does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.

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Executive Summary

In a difficult political context influenced by Brexit, rising nationalist and populist movements, the migration crisis and the social consequences of the economic crisis, the European institutions responded by a renewed emphasis on the necessity to give Europe a stronger social dimension through the launch of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Pillar should contribute to a greater focus on upward convergence on employment and social performance in Member States and to a stronger commitment to social rights in the European Union, including a more balanced economic and social coordination.

As the economy is recovering, employment in most – but not all – countries, is rising. However, in-work poverty is also increasing. There are 113 million people (22.5%) at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion; this is around 5 million below the 2008 level, but still 15 million above the Europe 2020 ambitions. Income poverty did not decrease in many countries.

At the start of the project, all Member States had some kind of Minimum Income Scheme, including Italy and Greece, which recently introduced new schemes. But that does not mean that countries' MIS can be called decent. In recent years in many countries (18) there have been some positive evolution in adequacy, accessibility and/or take-up; however, in other countries (9) the situation of minimum income beneficiaries has deteriorated.

The EMIN2 project organised several activities to contribute to the goal of progressive improvement of Minimum Income Schemes in Europe. The activities were focused on the 3 characteristics that are essential to call Minimum Income Schemes decent: they should be adequate, accessible and enabling. Today, only a few countries are successful in delivering benefits at the level of adequacy, defined by the at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

Advocacy for decent Minimum Income Schemes consisted in building networks at EU and at national level, awareness raising through conferences, public events and an EU-wide bus journey, the development of a communication strategy formulating clear messages and policy advocacy toward EU institutions, together with our EU partners and supporters. Since reference budgets are important tools to build consensus in society on what constitutes a decent life and to assess the adequacy of benefits as well as of the AROP threshold, EMIN2 organised a peer review on this theme, in cooperation with the reference budget experts in our partnership. As accessibility of benefits still is a major problem in many countries and non-take-up is sometimes extremely high, EMIN2's peer review on coverage and take-up formulated policy recommendations. Although all countries have developed activation strategies, these are not always contributing to an integrated, rights-based active inclusion of minimum income beneficiaries in the labour market and in society. Again a peer review on this theme formulated recommendations at EU and at national level. These activities in EMIN2 provided the backbone for an EU roadmap on the progressive realisation of adequate, accessible and enabling minimum income schemes that will guide our advocacy work in the coming period.

The European Pillar of Social Rights can reinforce the existing policy framework on adequate minimum income at European level, if implemented through an ambitious roadmap, using all possible instruments to realize effective social rights. Post 2020, the European Semester should be transformed into a European Semester for Sustainable Development, with a new, more ambitious target based on a common % reduction in poverty, aiming to deliver on the SDGs and Agenda 2030 with social and environmental ambitions at the same level as economic objectives. EU funding should be targeted more strongly in support of the realisation of social rights. If, after thorough evaluation of Europe 2020, the poverty target is found to be insufficiently attained, EMIN advocates the adoption of an EU framework directive on the right to a decent minimum income, to effectively contribute to the realisation of an enforceable social right for all in Europe. Investing in an infrastructure to ensure attention to Minimum income Schemes will be essential to ensure progress.

Part I: State of play and recommendations regarding Minimum Income Schemes

1. Some points on the political and social context

Some thoughts on the political environment for social action...

Since the start of this EMIN2 project, the political environment in the EU has been strongly influenced by the political discussions around migration, the negotiations after the Brexit referendum and by the rise in nationalist and populist movements that emerged stronger in certain countries at the occasion of national elections. In this context, it is evident that the European project requires a stronger social dimension and a renewed focus on social cohesion and inclusion.

Following on the Five Presidents' report in 2015, the European Commission reflection paper on the social dimension of Europe as part of the broader discussion on the future of the European Union, and establishing Europe's ambition to earn a 'social triple A', in November 2017, a **European Pillar of Social Rights**¹ was proclaimed by all EU institutions at a Social Summit for Fair jobs and Growth in Gothenburg, Sweden. The Pillar formulates 20 social principles and rights that should serve as a compass for renewed convergence within the European Union. It includes the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life for everyone lacking sufficient resources, ensuring progress on the access to this right affirmed in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Effective implementation of this right is essential for the credibility of the EU project.

... and some of the main social developments at the end of the EMIN2 project²

As the economy in many Member States is recovering, employment has reached levels well above those before the crisis and unemployment rates have mainly returned to pre-crisis levels. Long-term unemployment has started to decrease. But in several countries, such as Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy and Cyprus, the number of unemployed people remains very high. Moreover, being in work is not always enough to keep people out of poverty. Indeed, in-work poverty remains very high at 9.6% of the working population, well above the 2008 level (8.5%). In-work poverty is very high in Romania (more than 17%); but also in Luxemburg, Spain, Italy and Greece (all above 12%). Especially young people are trapped in low-wage jobs, which is linked to new forms of increasingly precarious work.

Since the financial crisis of 2008, there has been a considerable increase in the levels of people experiencing poverty or social exclusion. It reached a peak in 2012 with 123 million people (24.7% of the population) being at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion, an increase of 6.4 million compared to 2008. The aftermath of the crisis still shows a stark increase in inequalities, but the at-risk-of-poverty-and-social-exclusion rate (AROPE)³ has started to decline. According to the latest statistics available

¹ **Council of the European Union**, Proposal for an Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights, 13129/17, Brussels, 20 October 2017

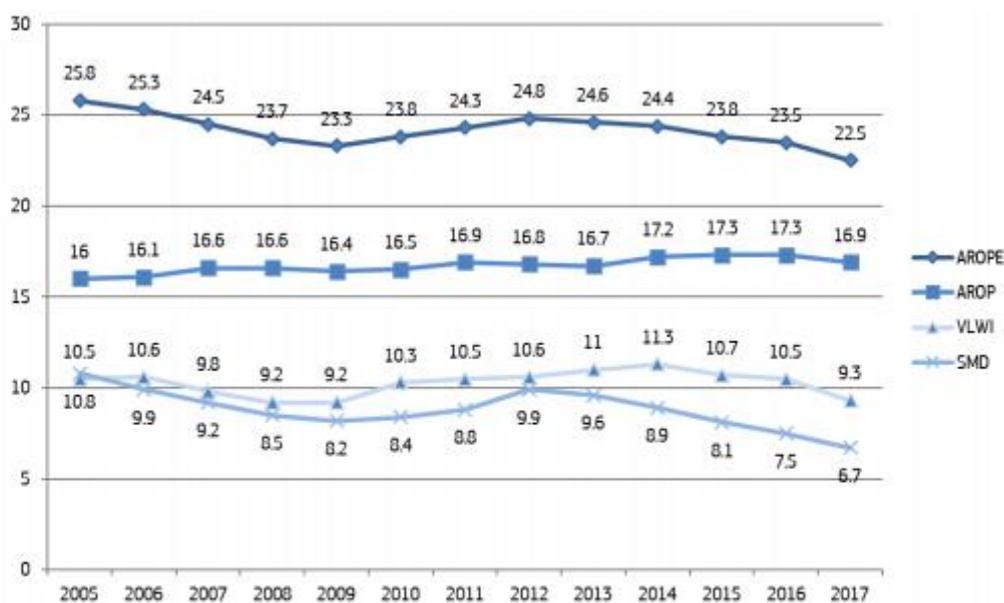
² **European Commission, Draft Joint Employment Report 2019**, text proposed on 21 November 2018 for adoption by the EPSCO Council

³ **People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)** are people who are at risk of poverty (AROP) and/or experiencing severe material deprivation (SMD) and/or living in households with very low work intensity (VLWI). People at risk of poverty are people living in a household whose equivalised disposable income is below 60% of the national equivalised median income (this indicator is therefore an income poverty indicator). People are severely materially deprived if they live in a household unable to afford at least four of the following items: 1) pay rent/mortgage/ utility bills on time; 2) keep home adequately warm; 3) meet unexpected expenses; 4)

at EU level (2017), 113 million people (22.5%) were at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion. Compared to the 2008 reference date, this represents a decrease of 5 million people, instead of a reduction of at least 20 million, as set by the Europe 2020 poverty target⁴.

The decline in AROPE is mainly driven by i) lower rates of people with low work intensity, although in 2017 still above pre-crisis levels and ii) lower rates of material deprivation, now below pre-crisis levels. Severe material deprivation remains a major problem in countries such as Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, with from 19% to 30% of the population living in deprivation. The situation of quasi-jobless households is especially problematic in Greece, Belgium, Spain and Croatia where between 10% and 16% of adults in a household work less than 20% of their potential. In Lithuania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Italy and Romania, the at-risk-of-poverty gap⁵ is more than 50%.

In 2017, income poverty showed a slight decline for the first time since the financial crisis, indicating that income of poorer households increased faster than median income. Although this suggests that there are improvements in the adequacy of certain social benefits and minimum income schemes, the extremely high level of income poverty for persons living in households with very low work intensity (62.3%) also points to a persistent gap in adequacy of social benefits in many countries. The impact of social transfers (excluding pensions) on poverty reduction continued to decline in 2017. The recent SPC benchmarking exercise also shows that the situation is critical in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Romania, but that in many more countries the poverty reduction capacity of social protection is problematic. In almost all countries income poverty in 2017 remained at higher levels than before the crisis in 2008.



Source: Eurostat, SILC.

Figure 1: At risk of poverty or social exclusion rate and its components (2005-2017) – Source: Joint Employment report 2019, p. 16

eat meat, fish or a protein equivalent every second day; 5) one week annual holiday away from home; 6) have access to a car for private use; 7) have a washing machine; 8) have a colour TV; and 9) have a telephone. People living in households with very low work intensity (i.e. (quasi-)jobless households) are people aged 0-59 living in a household where working age adults (18-59) worked less than 20% of their total work potential during the past year.

⁴ Draft Joint Employment report 2019

⁵ At-risk-of-poverty gap shows the difference between the median equivalised total net income of persons below the AROP threshold and the AROP, expressed as % of AROP

It is clear that not all groups in society benefited from the recovery: AROP is steadily decreasing for retirement pensioners in most Member States, but the situation of older women is of great concern; low-skilled workers, young people, especially in Spain, Italy and Greece, people with migrant backgrounds and people with disabilities still face problems on the labour market and are often at-risk-of-poverty. AROPE facing children remains very high at 24.5%.

Data on unmet medical care needs and housing cost overburden also show that minimum income beneficiaries have greater difficulties in accessing necessary services. The share of their disposable income spent on housing reaches almost 38%, compared to 10% on average.

Although income inequality started to reverse in 2017, driven by the faster increase of income for lower income households, this did not compensate for the significant increases of the past years. The 20% richest people have a disposable income that is 5.1 times higher than the poorest 20%.

2. Evolution in Minimum Income Schemes across Europe

Some positive evolutions in recent years on adequacy, coverage and/or take-up⁶

At the start of the EMIN2 project, we described recent developments in minimum income schemes across the EU. An extensive description of the initial situation in EMIN2 countries can be found in the context report, that was largely based on the contributions from the national context reports, produced by all EMIN2 teams⁷. The EU context report as well as the national reports can be found on the EMIN website. Meanwhile, some important evolutions took place during the project, some of these coinciding with Country-specific Recommendations requiring improvements.

At that time, **Greece** and **Italy** both started to introduce a MIS. In **Greece**, the social solidarity income was launched aimed at providing a safety net to households living in extreme poverty; in the first pilot phase (July to December 2016) the programme was implemented in 30 municipalities; in the second phase from January 2017, it covered 325 municipalities; full implementation in 2018 is expected to reach approximately 700.000 people. On top of the existing regional schemes, **Italy** had introduced the SIA, support to active inclusion, a prepaid card with a small amount of money for families with specific needs in very deprived economic conditions, dependent on signing up for an active inclusion contract. The measure was to be replaced by a new scheme, the REI (inclusion income support), that had been approved in 2017 and would have been rolled out throughout the country by 2018. But as a consequence of the elections, new plans have appeared to replace or complement the REI by a 'reddito di cittadinanza'. People in need, who are resident in Italy since at least 5 years would receive a modest benefit, charged on a 'social card' with restricted use, limited to purchasing only basic goods. Beneficiaries will be put in training or performing public utility works in exchange for the benefit. Concrete legislative proposals have not been published yet.

Estonia introduced an important increase in the basic MI benefits and in equivalence scales for dependent family members, that has a strong impact especially on large families. MI levels are now above absolute poverty but still way below the at risk of poverty indicator (AROP).

⁶ Based on EMIN context report and on a survey that was done with support of national EMIN teams at the occasion of the bus journey (no information on changes from CZ, DE, EL, NO, RS, SE).

⁷ Anne Van Lancker, Setting the scene, EMIN context report – developments in relation to Minimum Income schemes in Europe, October 2017.

Major changes occurred to the MIS in **Croatia** where time limits to the MIS have been eliminated and benefits can be combined with work; but in terms of adequacy the benefit is not even enough to cover the costs of a healthy food diet and reaches just 38% of the poverty threshold. Due to strict means-testing, coverage is limited. A new Social Welfare Law is in preparation that could further improve the existing minimum income scheme.

In **Cyprus** new legislation was introduced that changed criteria related to property and deposits whereby more people can now apply for the scheme. In addition, a new general health plan is expected to improve people's access to quality services and the introduction of a national minimum wage may help combat in-work poverty.

In **France**, RSA (revenu de solidarité active) increased 1.6% in September 2017 and 1% in April 2018. Reforms to the RSA aim at increasing the take-up of the benefit and the return rate to employment. In the National Strategy for Prevention of and Fight against Poverty, the government announced the introduction of a new scheme called 'revenu universel d'activité' with more simple procedures and a single social benefit. Information campaigns and better cooperation between services should increase take-up. There is a 'garantie d'activité' with reinforced social accompaniment of beneficiaries, better access to social services and extra efforts to reintegrate people in the labour market.

In **Luxemburg** reform of the MIS is in preparation with new eligibility criteria and amounts. The plan defines minimum income as a social right and also emphasizes the responsibility to be activated. Minimum income will be an individual right and amounts for children will increase. Both partners in a household will now participate in activation measures. Cooperation between employment services and social services granting the benefits will be enhanced and sanctions for non-compliance with activation obligations will be increased.

In **Romania**, the new law on minimum insertion income adopted in 2017 and which was supposed to take effect in April 2018 was postponed indefinitely. It will merge 3 existing social benefits into one MI benefit with an increased level of adequacy and coverage: the minimum inclusion income, targeted to the poorest families and combining a basic benefit with additional support for children and with a housing supplement. The aim is to lift 10% of households out of the extreme poverty they are living in. Recently a series of amendments to the existing law have been initiated to tighten the conditionality of minimum income benefits in case of refusal of a job offer or occasional seasonal work. This is likely to lead to increasing poverty.

Spain has a fragmented model of MI with important regional inequalities between Autonomous Communities who are responsible for their own (mostly inadequate) MIS. Following a research project *Review of the Minimum Income Schemes in Spain from the perspective of cost-effectiveness*, which was completed in December 2017 and financed through EaSI, three pillars mark the main challenges: effectiveness, efficiency and cohesion. There is a need for simplification and reordering of the system, homogenizing access requirements and improving coordination and improvement of approaches and adaptation. In particular there is a need for improving conditionalities in access to benefits, more activation and greater efficiency in active labour market policies and ensuring complementarity with other aid. To achieve a cohesive system and improvement in operational functioning, there is a need for improved information systems and better analysis, monitoring and evaluation. The next steps to implement the findings will be: the introduction of a Universal Social Card and a new Unemployment Subsidy merging former subsidies.

The **Netherlands** saw an important devolution of social policy to local authorities through the Participation Act and Social Support Act. Some local authorities have initiated experiments, lowering conditionality of benefit receipt and topping-up in-work benefits.

Finland changed the governance from municipalities to central government in order to minimize non-take-up and ensure more equal treatment. Finland has had a law since 2010 that obliges the government to commission regular evaluations of the MIS by independent experts. Since 2018 unemployment benefits are cut when people are not active within a period of 3 months. A so-called 'basic income experiment' was set up to explore the effects of reducing some of the conditionality linked to the reception of unemployment benefits. The first results of the evaluation are expected in 2019; a final report will come in 2020. But the experiment will not be continued and will be replaced by a much more activation-oriented scheme.

Iceland issued new guidelines to harmonize the reference amounts granted by municipalities. A team has been set up, including EAPN, that is currently reviewing MIS in all municipalities, to bring their rules into line with the guidelines. The aim is to ensure a harmonised support base, on top of which local authorities can grant additional support. Iceland also introduced a new central housing benefit and a health insurance scheme.

In **Slovenia**, the elimination of limits related to property had positive effects on take-up of benefits. However, low minimum wages act as a glass ceiling on MI levels that are so low they push people into poverty. MI levels were recently raised considerably and will further increase in 2019, albeit still at a low level. Child benefits are considered as the first source of income for families, that also determine access to other benefits and their amounts.

In **Slovakia** there are plans to slightly increase the level of MI benefits.

In **Latvia**, the guaranteed minimum income level has increased for the first time since 2012, but it still is extremely low. The plans to improve the minimum income scheme has not yet been approved by the government.

In **Lithuania** a new law on minimum income increased the rate of cash social assistance for the first time since 2008, from 100€ to 122€. But the amount still only covers 50% of the calculated minimum consumption rate, which includes only basic needs like food, clothes and transport. To provide more support to families with children and to motivate beneficiaries to take up paid work, a new child benefit was introduced that, together with part of the income from work, is not included in family income that establishes the persons' right to assistance.

In **Macedonia** the Ministry for Labour is working on a new law that will introduce a minimum income scheme for the first time, linked to a restructuring of a network of decentralised local social services.

In **Portugal**, improved equivalence scales and an increase in indexation used as reference for social benefits have resulted in an improvement of MI. Improved eligibility conditions (with regards to property, better access for prisoners and homeless people) have led to a slight increase in numbers of beneficiaries. The government is working on better articulation between public services and local authorities. Given the key links between adequacy of minimum income and affordable housing, the proposal in the Portuguese state budget for 2019 to support access to housing for disadvantaged people, is an important development.

In other countries the reforms are lacking ambition or the results are pointing in a negative direction.

Hungary has reformed the existing scheme, that was already considered as inadequate. It centralized the implementation of the employment replacement benefit (which is considered as minimum income but has extremely low income thresholds) and left some rights to local municipalities for additional income support provision, that made the system even less generous. The ruling coalition

that was reconfirmed at the last elections persists in not investing in social protection and continues the workfare schemes.

In **Denmark** lower benefits have been introduced for people with residence of less than 7 years during the last 8 years, a measure that specifically hits migrants. MIS reform also reduced benefits for those aged 25 to 29 years. The Danish MIS is much more complex with now 12 different rates of MI. A cap has been put on social assistance limiting additional support for housing and energy. An obligation to work at least 225 hours per year illustrates the interpretation of the 'make work pay' principle. During the project there were no signs of positive changes.

In the **UK**, Minimum Income Schemes for working age households are being replaced by Universal Credit, that is being rolled out for new clients by 2018 and for all beneficiaries by 2025; but is now likely to be further delayed. Freezing of benefits for four years, cuts to child and family tax credits, the roll-out of the less generous Universal Credit benefit and the introduction of a 2-child restriction for child tax credits and Universal Credit have considerably eroded the benefit system. Recently, some positive changes have happened that could mitigate some of the administrative issues. These include reduction in waiting times before payment of the first claim, an extension of repayment time for loan advances (while awaiting first payment) and a cap on the percentage that can be taken from each Universal Credit payment while repaying the advance. Nevertheless, the UK EMIN team reports that there is widespread agreement from those outside UK government that Universal Credit is seriously, some believe fatally, flawed. Organisations calling either for a temporary pause in the Universal Credit roll-out, or halting it entirely, include: foodbanks, disability organisations, welfare advice agencies, rights and advocacy organisations, major faith groups, major trades unions and the Scottish Government as well as many UK politicians. The UK EMIN team also considers the Universal Credit system to offer inadequate income to enable social participation, to be inaccessible for some people who need it, and to drive some people into exploitative or unsustainable paid work.

In **Austria**, attempts to renew the agreement on MI between the central government and the provinces failed. Since then, most provinces have reviewed their MIS introducing cuts and caps on MI, housing or child benefits, replacing benefits in cash by benefits in kind and/or by introducing special provisions for non-Austrian citizens and excluding refugees with subsidiary protection from the MIS. The new conservative government in Austria is now working on a new law on minimum income that could have negative impacts on families with 2 or more children, people with disabilities and especially, migrants.

In **Bulgaria**, in 2018 there has been a 15% increase of minimum income benefits, following a 9-year freeze. The adequacy levels of MI benefits have decreased since the benefits have not been adjusted to the rising cost of living. The gap with the poverty line and with minimum wages is growing. The government is considering using a methodology of consumption baskets to ensure adequacy of benefits, but there is strong opposition from the powerful business community.

Since 2015 in **Lithuania**, municipalities provide cash social assistance for poor residents, financed from municipal funds under equal conditions. Municipalities can complement with extra benefits. The reform contributed to a reduction in the number of beneficiaries and the poverty rate has increased.

In **Malta**, the fact that a one-time granting of a child supplement is not continued, had a negative impact on MI.

In **Croatia**, the new social welfare act will only take effect in December 2019.

In **Belgium**, commitments to lift the lowest benefits above the poverty threshold were not met, although some increases for the lowest benefits are foreseen for 2018, 2020 and 2022. More

conditionality is imposed on benefit recipients. There were plans to introduce the possibility to impose a community service obligation in the personalised integration contracts for minimum income beneficiaries. Fortunately, based on a complaint by BAPN and other CSOs, the Constitutional Court has judged this obligation unconstitutional. Promises to increase benefit levels above the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, anchored in the Coalition Agreement, have been abandoned.

In **Poland** a new generous child allowance that is paid by the central government, can now be combined with MI granted by local authorities. However, this reform has caused a drastic reduction in take-up of MI because of its low amount in comparison with the child allowance.

Although in the **Czech Republic**, the living and subsistence minimum will be increased by 11.1%, the amounts of living and subsistence minimum have not increased since 2012, whilst at the same time the inflation of prices of basic goods was significant, and therefore benefits cannot be considered adequate. For those who are beneficiaries for 6 months or longer, 35-65% of the amount for living is paid in the form of vouchers for purchasing only selected types of goods in selected stores. For many beneficiaries, there are serious barriers in accessing the selected stores, and it makes them buy more expensive goods and spend the full value of voucher – as a result, the actual disposable amount is lower. After 6 months, recipients of benefits must perform public work, otherwise they will receive only the subsistence minimum (instead of the higher living minimum). The Supplement for Housing was limited to a maximum of 80% of the normative housing costs for people living in expensive dormitories. Municipalities can declare an “area with increased occurrence of negative social phenomena”, where it is not at all possible to receive Supplement for Housing.

3. Essential characteristics of decent Minimum Income Schemes

In the EMIN project we qualify Minimum Income Schemes as decent when they have 3 characteristics that we consider as essential: Minimum Income Schemes should be adequate, accessible and enabling. During the project, at national levels as well as at EU level, we have been advocating to improve the quality of Minimum Income Schemes on these 3 levels. This was pursued through policy advocacy, through the bus journey and through the peer reviews. In the following paragraphs our findings are further developed.

3.1 Adequacy of Minimum Income Scheme

The adequacy of minimum income benefits can be measured by comparing the income of beneficiaries with the national poverty threshold (as an indication of the poverty alleviation effect of schemes). The 2016 report of the European Social Policy Network⁸ made a comparison of minimum income schemes' adequacy based on MIPI data, a model family data base of tax and benefit systems in Europe. The analysis takes account of net disposable income packages: the gross earnings, less income tax and less social insurance contributions, plus housing benefits, plus heating benefits, less local taxes, plus non-contributory rights-based benefits to which the model family is eligible, in particular social assistance and income and non-income tested child/family benefits. The packages take account of additional non-discretionary benefits, such as housing allowances. The results showed that at that time for most family types in **Romania, Latvia and Poland**, the minimum income didn't even reach 40% of the AROP threshold.

⁸ Jonathan Bradshaw and Sarah Marchal, A comparison of minimum income schemes in European countries using MIPI data in Frazer, H. and Marlier, E., Minimum Income schemes in Europe, a study of national policies, ESPN January 2016, annex 2

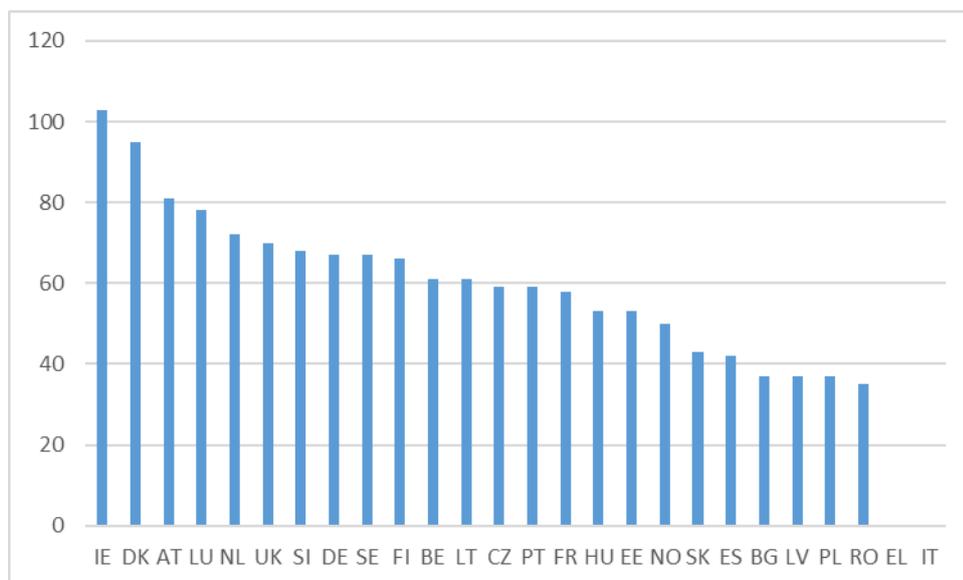


Figure 2: Social assistance as % of 60% median income, couple with two children (MIPI data based on EU-SILC 2013) - Source: own graph based on study ESPN on Minimum Income in the EU 2015.⁹

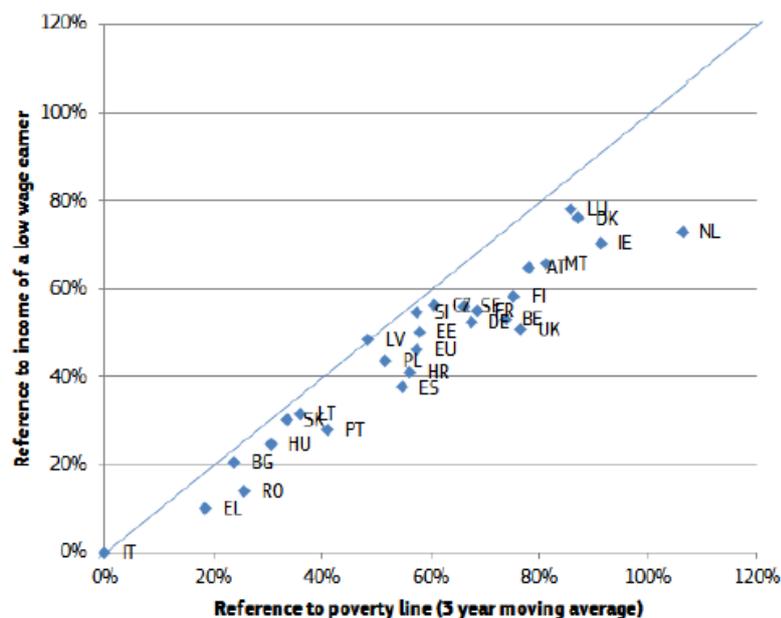
Based on a recent SPC exercise on benchmarking minimum income, the current aim of the European Commission is to develop a framework to compare the performance and design of MIS across Member States. To foster convergence, the EU Commission uses **two indicators** in order to assess the adequacy of minimum income protection: (1) the income of minimum income beneficiaries as a share of the **national poverty threshold** (over 3 years) (2) the income of minimum income beneficiaries as a **share of a low wage** (earnings at 50% of average wages). Together with these indicators the Commission also evaluates the relevant context information of Minimum Income Schemes, focusing on:

- Eligibility and means testing of the schemes, also the residence test (MISSOC data base)
- Activation: conditions and financial incentives, gap in access to services for beneficiaries (indicators based on EU-SILC: access to some services such as health care), gap between jobless and working households.

On the basis of this SPC benchmarking exercise, the first assessment shows that, for a single person household in 2016, the Netherlands, Ireland, Denmark and Luxemburg provide a minimum income above 80% of AROP, whereas at the lower end, in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Lithuania, minimum income does not reach 40% of AROP and only 1/3 of low wages¹⁰.

⁹ At that time, Greece, Italy and Spain did not have national MIS. Calculation for Italy and Spain were based on fairly generous schemes in Milan and Catalonia

¹⁰ These findings are slightly different from the results of the ESPN research, due to different data sets regarding income calculation, household types and year of registration, but convergence in outcomes is striking.



Source: Eurostat, OECD.

Note: Information is not available for CY. Information about IT and EL does not include the newly introduced minimum income schemes in 2017. Latest available information about poverty thresholds in IE, HR, and UK is for 2015 income year.

Figure 3 Net Income of minimum income recipients as % of at-risk-of-poverty threshold (smoothed over 3 years) and of the income of a low wage earner (2016) – Source: draft employment report 2019, p.86

The case law of the Committee for the **European Charter of Social Rights** of the Council of Europe considers that minimum income can only be seen as appropriate when the monthly amount of assistance benefits, including medical assistance, is not manifestly below the poverty threshold that is established at 50% of median equivalised income¹¹. Although all Member States have ratified the European Charter of Social Rights, it is obvious that most of them would not pass the test of the Committee regarding the adequacy of their minimum income support.

The **EMIN1 project report**¹², concluded that in most countries adequacy of MIS is **not at the centre of the political debate**. Amongst countries there are many different definitions of what constitutes a decent income. In most countries **no official benchmarks** are used to determine the level of benefits; some countries use concepts such as subsistence level of income or implement MIS as measures to avoid absolute poverty. In some countries reference budgets are used to set the level of minimum income, but EMIN teams note that the baskets used do not cover all necessary expenses. In countries where reference budgets are well-conceived, they are seldom used as benchmarks for MI levels.

¹¹ Council of Europe, Digest of the case law of the European committee of social rights, September 2008

¹² Van Lancker Anne, Toward adequate and accessible Minimum Income Schemes in Europe: Analysis of Minimum Income Schemes and roadmaps in 30 countries participating in the EMIN project - Synthesis report, January 2015 p.20

Reference budgets, a promising tool in the fight for decent income standards

Reference budgets are illustrative priced **baskets of goods and services** that people need at the minimum to adequately participate in a given country, region or city. Baskets imply goods and services related to **10 domains of human life**: adequate housing, healthy food, personal care, health care, clothing, mobility, leisure time, rest, safe childhood and maintenance of social relations. Methodologies used comprise statistical data, expert knowledge and focus groups. Reference budgets have been developed in almost all countries in the EU, by different types of organisations for different purposes and different uses.

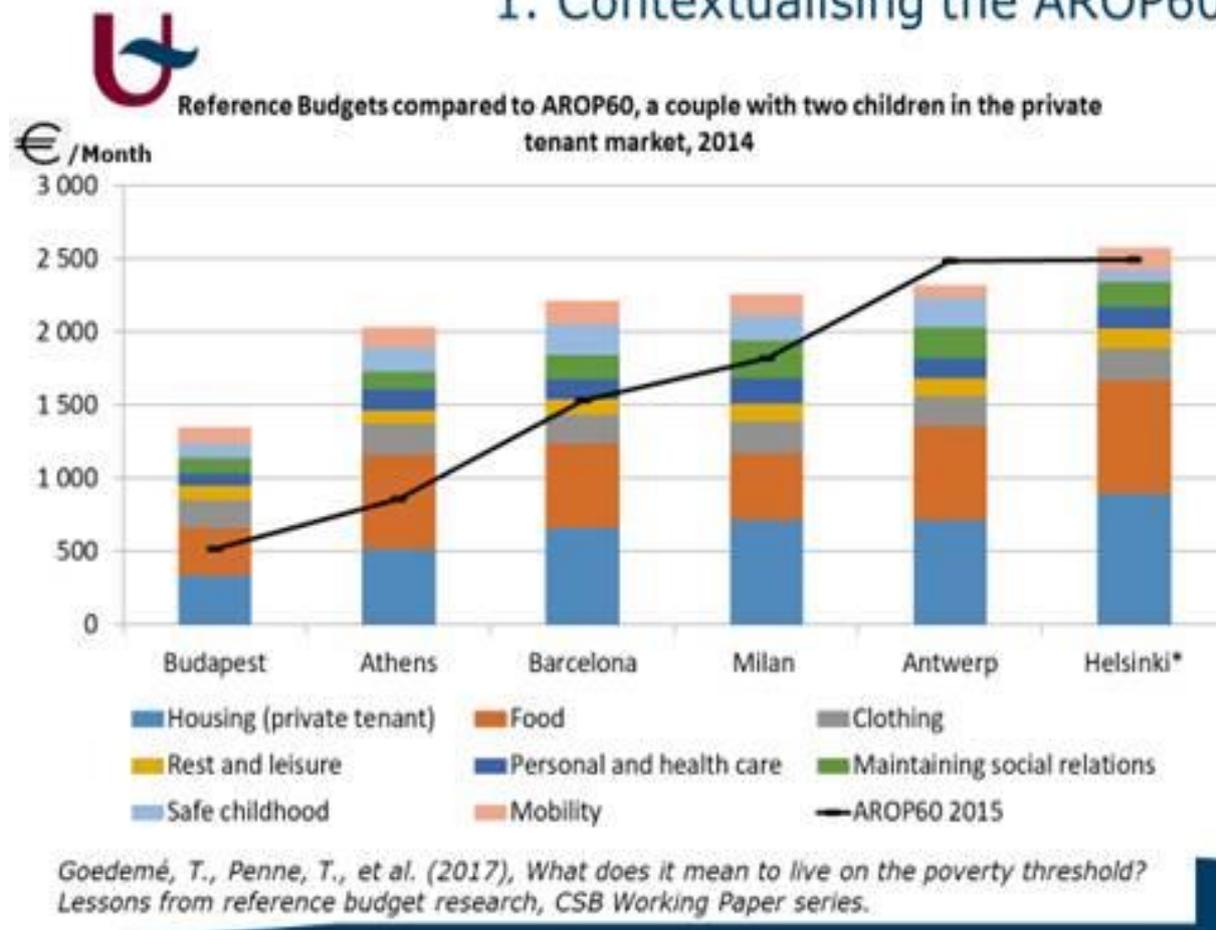
The ‘Pilot Project on developing a common methodology on reference budgets in Europe’, funded by the European Commission in 2013, had **three main objectives**: 1) to establish a reference budgets’ **network** composed of key experts and representative stakeholders, at national and EU level 2) to develop a theoretical framework and a common **methodology** for developing cross-nationally comparable reference budgets in the EU Member States 3) to develop **comparable food baskets** for the capital city of a maximum number of Member States and as many as possible other baskets. The Project succeeded in developing food baskets for 26 EU Member States, and a basket for health care, personal care and housing for eight EU Member States¹³.

The Reference Budgets Project has shown that reference budgets are a **promising instrument** to build consensus in society about what is an adequate income. They provide a tool to **monitor the social situation** and for policy learning, in addition to existing social indicators, notably the at-risk-of-poverty indicator. Reference budgets can also be used as a **benchmark to assess the adequacy of people’s net income**. They help to understand what kind of living standard can be reached with an income at the level of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Results of the research show that the at-risk-of-poverty threshold represents very different levels of (in)adequacy of income across capital cities in Europe.

Research shows that families, especially those with children, living in the capital cities of poorer countries on Minimum Income Schemes cannot afford a healthy diet based on the food basket. If all other basic needs were taken into account, Minimum Income Schemes in many countries would appear not to be fully adequate. Where in some countries, using complete reference budgets to determine the level of income support would be too ambitious, reference budgets can also be used reduce the cost of essential goods and services, to identify priorities for policy action and to facilitate cross-national learning.

¹³ Goedemé, T., Storms, B., Penne, T., & Van den Bosch, K. (2015). The development of a methodology for comparable reference budgets in Europe - Final report of the pilot project. Brussels: European Commission.

1. Contextualising the AROP60



The **EMIN1 synthesis report**¹⁴ shows that several national teams refer to the necessity to use reference budgets for various purposes. The **EMIN2 national reports** also reflect on the use and value of reference budgets¹⁵.

¹⁴ Anne Van Lancker, *Towards adequate and accessible Minimum Income Schemes in Europe, Analysis of Minimum Income Schemes and roadmaps in 30 countries participating in the EMIN project*, Synthesis report, January 2015, p.26

¹⁵ See EMIN context report p.24-27

To further explore the possible use of reference budgets, especially in relation to the discussion on adequacy of benefit systems, a **peer review** was organised during the EMIN2 project¹⁶. The following **recommendations** were formulated during this peer review:

1. The discussion on the experiences and practices of RBs at the macro level found that RBs are a very useful indicator to contextualise the common poverty indicators, such as the 60% of median income at-risk-of-poverty threshold.
2. Because RBs represent a societal consensus on the real cost of a decent life, it is a very useful tool to raise awareness about the shortcomings of the national welfare systems and to advocate for adequate Minimum Income Schemes in our European societies. RBs should never be prescriptive. They should deal with the question ‘how to live a life in dignity?’ not with the question ‘how to stay alive?’
3. RBs are a useful instrument to identify priorities or intermediate goals on how to move forward in the battle against poverty, e.g. by bringing in the importance of affordable (public) goods and services. In this regard, fully developed reference budgets are also very useful for those countries where raising minimum incomes to the level of the complete reference budgets would be overly ambitious in the medium term.
4. At the local level, RBs are a powerful tool to promote social and educative support for people, especially for those at the lower end of the income distribution. Many promising examples were presented at the peer review, illustrating the practical use of RBs for budget advice, debt counselling, calculating additional financial aid for needy people, and assessing the quality and accessibility of public goods and services. Working with complete reference budgets on a local level can pave the way to promote their use on the macro level.
5. Well-informed societal stakeholders fully committed to the process of constructing and disseminating RBs, could promote and carefully protect the proper, non-prescriptive, use of RBs, namely as “priced baskets of goods and services that are illustrative for what people need at the minimum for social participation”.

The peer review clearly shows that there is strong interest in developing fully-specified RBs that could be applied at different levels of social policy. The peer review on RBs was a great opportunity to connect different agents interested in RBs: researchers, societal stakeholders, policy advisers, civil servants and other professionals from the social field. Many lessons were learned and all participants ended up with a clear long-term vision on RBs research and all its possible applications. It is key to continue to work together with all these agents to effectively use RBs for concrete policy purposes in order to help building social cohesion and alleviate poverty in Europe.

¹⁶ Tess Penne and Irene Cusso Parcerisas, Report and recommendations from EMIN peer review on the use of reference budgets for policy purposes, Antwerp 18-19 September 2018, University of Antwerp, November 2018

3.2 Accessibility of Minimum Income Schemes

Accessible is defined in the EMIN project as providing comprehensive coverage for all people who need the schemes for as long as they need the support. Accessible Minimum Income Schemes have clearly defined criteria, they are universal, non-contributory and means-tested. They do not discriminate against any particular group and have straightforward application procedures. They avoid *institutional* barriers such as bureaucratic and complex regulations and procedures and they have the minimum required conditionality. They avoid *implementation* barriers by reaching out to and supporting potential beneficiaries to overcome personal barriers such as lack of information, shame or loss of privacy.

Although most MIS are seen as universal schemes designed to lift all people in need out of poverty, **coverage** of the population is often limited by applying eligibility criteria that exclude more or less wide proportions of the population.

At EU level there are **no agreed indicators or benchmarks** with regards to accessibility of MIS. However, the SPC exercise on benchmarking MIS comprises reflections on eligibility criteria. The main requirements to access MIS in most countries are linked to citizenship and residence, age, lack of financial resources, not having assets above a certain limit, and having exhausted all rights to other benefits. The **degree of universality** of MIS depends to a large extent on the strictness of means-testing, including the income threshold and the incomes included in the test. For the European Commission, conditions related to time of residence are a matter to follow up.

In the EMIN project¹⁷ teams stated that coverage was low in certain countries, due to income thresholds to qualify for MIS that are extremely low, often below 40% of median income which is the absolute poverty line. In other countries coverage is reduced through excessive means-testing. With regards to target groups considered or excluded from the group of potential beneficiaries, reforms have been introduced in recent years that target income support to those deemed most in need, or to certain groups such as families with children.

The EMIN context report mentions that asylum seekers and undocumented **migrants** are not eligible for MI, but also people who recently settled in the country do not have access. **Homeless people** have difficulties in accessing MIS, since they often cannot prove their residence. **Young people** also face problems. Minimum age requirements represent an issue of concern. Another group often facing problems in accessing MI benefits are the **long-term unemployed** who have exhausted their right to unemployment benefits. This problem is linked to the critical transition from contributory allowances to non-contributory social assistance. This proves that the **groups that are the most hit by the crisis** are often also those left behind with regards to access to MIS. Often the argument is used that MI should not discourage labour market participation or encourage welfare tourism.

Non-take-up is also seen as a serious problem that is not adequately addressed. It creates inequalities within the group of people in vulnerable situations who are entitled to benefits, between those who take them up and those who do not.

The EMIN context report pointed to possible measures to improve coverage and take-up, based on the ESPN report and the recommendations of the EMIN1 project. To further this work, the EMIN2 project organised a **peer review** on the subject coverage and take-up¹⁸.

¹⁷ See EMIN context report p. 19-23

¹⁸ EMIN peer review on coverage and take-up, Helsinki 13-14 March

The EMIN2 peer review built upon the analysis of a **Eurofound study**¹⁹ which presented conservative estimates of non-take-up that reached 40% or more. In the EMIN1 project, teams gave indications of non-take-up in countries that ranged from 20% to as much as 75%. Several **reasons** can be identified for non-take-up in EMIN countries: **unknown rights** and lack of communication when individuals are not aware of their rights or do not know how to claim MI. The complexity of some MIS also causes higher non-take-up. **Unclaimed rights** by constraint happens when the costs connected to access to MIS are perceived to exceed the potential benefit. Unclaimed rights by 'choice' are linked with the conditions to access MIS that potential beneficiaries are not ready to accept: conditionality linked to activation, especially where public works can be imposed, severe property census, controls that are seen as humiliating or extra conditions that can be imposed. The Eurofound study arranged the reasons for non-take-up according to different levels of decision-making: the individual, the administration, the design of the scheme, but also society as a whole.

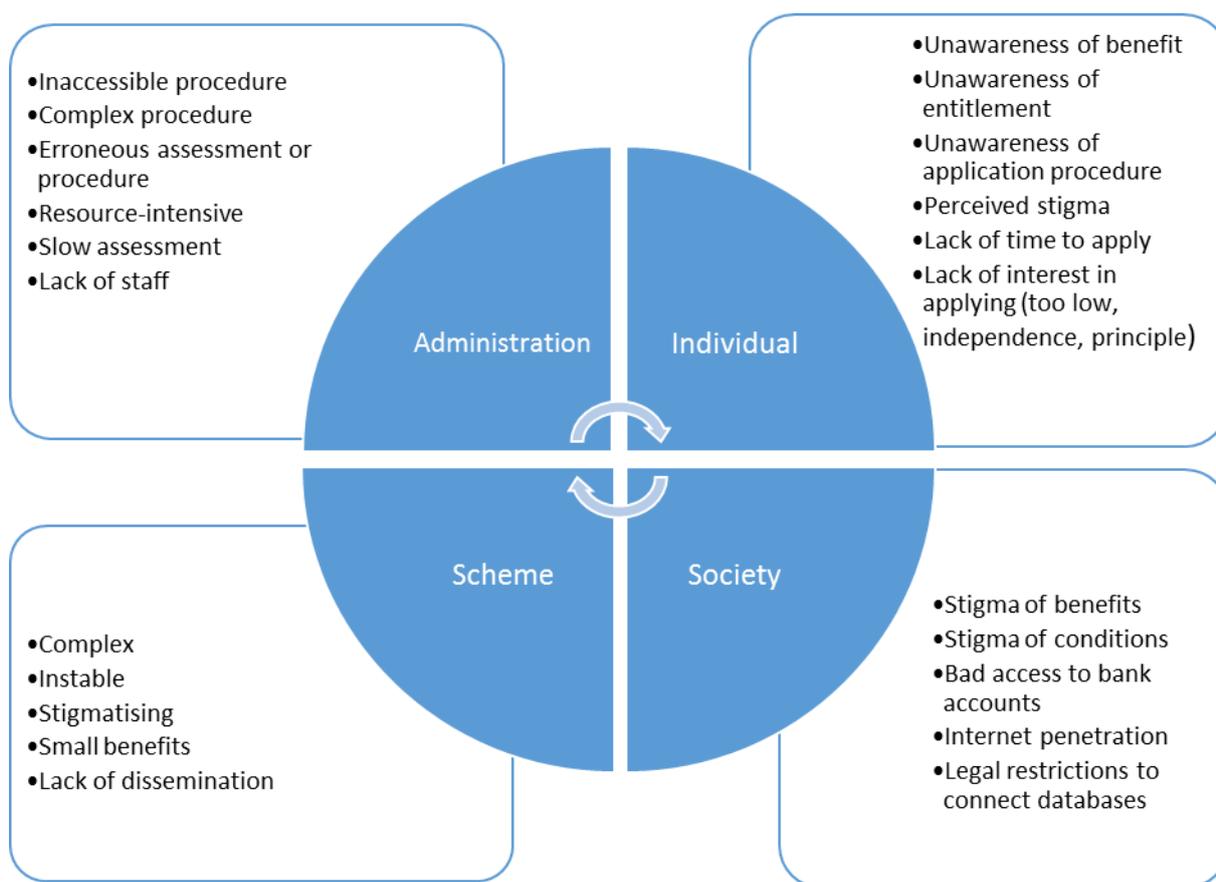


Figure 3: Risk factors for non-take-up at four levels. Source: Eurofound, p.25

The Eurofound study explains that even though reducing non-take-up may not seem an attractive policy option, since it can be expected to increase public expenditure on benefits, there are strong **arguments** in favour of addressing the gap between take-up and entitlements.

¹⁹ Dubois H. and Ludwinek A, Access to benefits, reducing non-take-up, Eurofound 2015

The peer review identified several possible measures at **administrative level** and at **societal level**, to reduce non-take-up. Some important messages come from the peer review. The discussions during the peer review resulted in the following **recommendations**:

1. Possibilities to improve coverage and take-up in the **design of the benefit**, include: participation of people who have experienced poverty; increasing the level of minimum income; lowering the threshold to access benefits and establishing simple and transparent entitlement criteria, that avoid application of criteria related to age and lengthy residence periods.
2. To assess adequacy of minimum income benefits, a **benchmark is needed at EU level**; the 60% of median income at-risk-of-poverty threshold, combined with the use of reference budgets provide good instruments for this purpose.
3. Access to adequate, accessible and enabling minimum income benefits should be conceived as a **social right**, anchored in law.
4. Means-testing should be limited, and negative conditionality should be avoided.
5. Minimum Income Schemes that are **adequate and accessible** are more likely to receive higher levels of take-up. Schemes also need **simplification**.
6. **Raising awareness** has a dual role in reducing non-take-up: it may change how the public sees the recipients of Minimum Income and reduce stigma. A greater awareness can also increase the take-up among those who were eligible for the benefit, but unaware that it exists.
7. **Co-operation** between the minimum income administration and other agencies may have positive effects in reducing non-take-up. **Resources** are needed for designing and monitoring the benefits system, and for social workers to enable outreach to the community.
8. Even though increased coverage and take-up may lead to rising social expenditure in the short term, there are incentives for governments to react to these issues. In the longer run, increased coverage and take-up may lead to lower public costs, alleviate poverty in the extreme cases and help governments to reach their **EU2020 poverty targets**²⁰.

3.3 Enabling Minimum Income Schemes

In all countries, the receipt of social assistance benefits is dependent upon job-search and being available to take up work. A clear trend in all EU Member States is increasing conditionality, which links benefits to participation in activation programmes or to work acceptance. In all countries non-compliance with the obligation to actively look for work can result in sanctions such as denying access, temporary suspension or even exclusion from the benefit. Good quality Minimum Income Schemes should be enabling and be developed within the integrated Active Inclusion paradigm which aims at the integration of adequate cash transfer and access to essential services and to inclusive labour markets.

²⁰Lauri Mäkinen, Report and Recommendations from the Peer Review on coverage and non-take-up of Minimum Income, Helsinki 13-14 March 2018, Department of Social Research, University of Turku, April 2018, p.21-29

In the **national reports of the EMIN2 project**, teams reflect on the linkages between MIS and willingness to work and activation strategies.

In **Austria**, MI benefits can now be granted to adults in training and apprenticeship. But the country also introduced an obligatory community service and stricter sanctions related to willingness to work. In **Belgium** there is stronger social and professional activation for MI beneficiaries: the individual plans for social integration, previously only for young people, now also apply to adults. In **Bulgaria**, an obligation to participate in public works was introduced, at a rate of 24€ per month as extra social assistance. Also the **Czech Republic** introduced the obligation to participate in public work for some extra benefits. In **Lithuania**, MI can now be combined with income from low-intensity work and training benefits; at the same time benefits are more linked to willingness to work and to participate in socially useful activities organised by municipalities. Equally in **Romania** a new law planned to strengthen the link with the labour market and part of wages are exempt for calculation of the revenue of potential MI beneficiaries. However, the law is not yet passed. The team from **Cyprus** sees positive developments through increased opportunities for training and employment experience for MI beneficiaries. The **Danish** report sees a political discourse dominated by 'it shall pay to work', where job centres are assessing the employability of unemployed people, but there is a lack of job opportunities for people on MI benefits. In **Estonia**, plans were worked out to better motivate MI beneficiaries to work and increased efforts are being deployed to enhance work opportunities for people with decreased work abilities. At the same time sanctions for people who do not comply with their individual activity plan are made stricter. **Finland** has introduced stronger conditionality related to willingness to work. Also in **Iceland** there is now more focus on willingness to work, while at the same time access to services has been improved. In **Portugal**, employment measures have been more oriented to groups most affected by unemployment such as young people and long-term unemployed. There is also more emphasis on training opportunities and socially useful productive work. The **UK** reports states that conditionality linked to willingness to work has strongly increased, while at the same time austerity measures have seriously limited access and quality of services for job-search, training, personalised support and health care.

Teams in the EMIN1 project already signalled that the real reasons for the limited success of activation strategies – in contrast to what well-conceived active inclusion strategies should be – are to be found in the following: active labour market measures often are not accessible or effective for MI beneficiaries; by taking a punitive approach to conditionality households are driven into greater hardship which can lead to increased deprivation and costs, as well as pushing them further from the labour market; the lack of capacity of job centres or case managers to help vulnerable people with complex problems, and generally, a lack of availability of quality accessible jobs and relevant training for MI beneficiaries is a serious obstacle to ensure active inclusion.

To further reflect on ways to improve the links between Minimum Income policies and active inclusion strategies, EMIN organised a **peer review** on the subject²¹.

The peer review was introduced on the basis of the **ESPN study on national policies for the integration of long-term unemployed**²² where the experts record that in many countries, activation and active labour market policies are mainly concentrated on unemployed persons with shorter spells of unemployment. As regards the effectiveness of activation services, ESPN experts are of the opinion that only in a few countries, services are very good. They formulate challenges to improve effectiveness of activation services: poor quality and range of services available, lack of tailoring of

²¹ Frazer, Hugh, report and recommendations on the EMIN peer review on active inclusion, Madrid 20-21 September 2018, Maynooth University, November 2018

²² Bouget et al, Integrated support for the long-term unemployed in Europe, 2015

services to their needs, low coverage of activation services and low proportion of unemployed people benefitting from them, failure to sufficiently target those most in need, lack of coordination, insufficient focus on the labour market, too strong focus on public work and problems with conditionality. Contrary to the discourse on horizontal coordination of services and integration into one-stop-shops, the experts point to the fragmentation between employment services, social services and institutions that provide income support. The ESPN experts also note that there is often insufficient focus on the demand side and creating enough sustainable and good quality jobs which are accessible to the long-term unemployed. They recommend the development of individual action plans covering activation measures combined with personalised integration contracts addressing social and health needs of people facing complex obstacles to accessing the labour market. These plans should ensure that good quality activation measures are available for all long-term unemployed people and are complemented by effective access to high quality services and to adequate income support according to the active inclusion approach.

Four overall conclusions were reached by the peer review:

- The European Commission's active inclusion recommendation continues to provide an important framework and approach for developing effective responses to poverty and social exclusion and supporting the progressive integration of those of working age who are excluded from society and/or the labour market
- The implementation of active inclusion approaches is very uneven across the EU and while some countries have made good progress, too many countries still lack a coherent policy framework and tend to confuse active inclusion with (or narrow it down to) activation measures
- There are many positive examples of active inclusion approaches making a significant and positive impact on people's lives and these provide good models that others can build on; Further developing and intensifying active inclusion approaches will be critical to achieving the EU's 2020 targets in relation to employment and the reduction of poverty or social exclusion and to implementing the EU Pillar of Social Rights.

The discussion during the peer review resulted in the following **recommendations**:

AT EU level

1. The European Commission should put the promotion of active inclusion approaches and the implementation of the Active Inclusion Recommendation at the heart of the **implementation** of the **EU Pillar of Social Rights**.
2. As part of the Europe 2020 process and the **European Semester** the European Commission and the Social Protection Committee should closely monitor the development of active inclusion frameworks by Member States and their implementation. The Commission should report on progress in their **country reports** and develop **Country Specific Recommendations** to countries lagging behind.
3. The European Commission should ensure that promoting active inclusion is a key a priority in the next **Multiannual Financial Framework**.
4. The Commission should develop clear guidelines for the use of **EU Funds** to support active inclusion measures so as to ensure that they are part of an overall strategic, coordinated and integrated approach and that EU Funds lever additional funding by national (or sub-national) authorities. The guidelines should stress the importance of particularly targeting active inclusion measures at the most at risk groups such as lone parents, older workers, persons with disabilities, people from a migrant background and the Roma.

5. The Commission should invest in fostering a wider understanding of what an active inclusion approach means through documenting and highlighting **good practice** and organising regular exchanges and **peer reviews**. This should lead to more explicit guidance to Member States on implementing the Active Inclusion Recommendation.
6. The Commission in conjunction with the Social Protection Committee should further develop work on **reference budgets** and build consensus on methodologies to be employed by Member States to ensure adequate levels of minimum income. They should regularly monitor progress in this regard in each Member State.
7. The Commission and Social Protection Committee should develop guidelines on good practice in **involving civil society organisations**, especially NGOs, in the development, implementation and monitoring of active inclusion measures, highlight good practice in this regard and monitor progress on a regular basis.

At national level

8. Countries that still have not developed coherent, comprehensive and coordinated **overall policy frameworks** aimed at developing, delivering and monitoring active inclusion approaches for people of working age should do so.
9. In developing active inclusion programmes attention should be given to developing **adequate support** for those who cannot work as well as for those who have potential for integration in to the labour market.
10. In delivering active inclusion programmes countries should give a high priority to ensuring **effective coordination and cooperation** arrangements between employment, income support and social services at local level and to facilitating ease of contact for clients through single-point-of-contact arrangements. In many cases this will require investing in administrative capacity.
11. Increased use should be made of **individual active inclusion plans** and personalised integration contracts that are tailored to the particular needs of people who are excluded from society and/or the labour market.
12. Countries with low and inadequate levels of minimum income support should put in place a methodology for establishing an **adequate minimum income** and establish an annual procedure for updating levels of payment.
13. Countries with limited availability of **social services** or with poor quality social services should invest in improving these services and in particular should invest in the front-line staff who are working with people who are excluded.
14. National (and sub-national) authorities responsible for developing active inclusion measures should prioritise recipients of minimum income benefits and should clearly identify and **target those individuals and specific groups at particularly high risk of social exclusion** such as the long-term unemployed, lone parents, older workers, people with a disability, Roma, people from a migrant background and the homeless.
15. In **using EU Funds** to promote social inclusion Member States should prioritise support for comprehensive and coordinate active inclusion approaches. They should avoid once-off or isolated measures that are not integrated into an overall three pillar active inclusion approach. They should also use EU Funds to enhance administrative capacity to deliver active inclusion programmes and to train front-line staff.

16. **NGOs** should be given a key role in the development, delivery and monitoring of active inclusion measures.

4. Advocating for decent Minimum Income Schemes

4.1 Networking for improved Minimum Income Schemes

Strengthening networking to achieve the progressive realisation of adequate accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes was one of the key objectives of the EMIN2 project. In almost all countries demonstrable progress was made during the project. This included:

Experts by experience and academic experts

Experts by Experience played a vital role in the project and were particularly mobilised to engage with the Bus Trip. Examples of this included: SAND (Homeless organisation in Denmark), EAPN-Fin civil action group, members of the local council of citizens who have benefited or still benefit from Social Insertion Income (Portugal), beneficiaries of Minimum Income (Romania, Czech Republic), experts by experience (Belgium, Iceland, Austria, Spain), three grassroots dialogue sessions with groups of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, black parents and children and multiply disadvantaged claimants of minimum income (UK), discussions with young Roma in Asturias, Spain.

The important role of Antwerp University ensured an important step forward in the contact and interaction between academics and researchers working on reference budgets and NGOs and civil society actors involved in EMIN. There was also good links and cross-over with the European Social Policy Network, which ensured synergies between the work of this important academic and research network and EMIN's work. All of this contributed to a notable strengthening of engagement of academics with the work of the National EMIN networks. Examples of this were noted in Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Czechia, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, UK, Netherlands and Lithuania.

Public authorities and ministries

In regard to public authorities and ministries the key development was the cooperation towards the establishment of an EU Platform of National Public Authorities responsible for Minimum Income Schemes, an important contribution of the EMIN2 project. With the support of the Belgian Federal Public Service for Social Integration two meetings with representatives of the Public Authorities were arranged to facilitate the development of this cooperation. These meetings also gave the opportunity to share information on the different national systems and to exchange re-activation measures to accompany Minimum Income Schemes. Terms of reference for the EU Platform were agreed and to date, fourteen National Public Authorities have indicated their interest in engagement. The agreed terms of reference, which are a work in progress, are included as an annex to this report.

In addition, there was a noticeable strengthening of engagement with ministries in many countries including Bulgaria, Belgium, Cyprus, Lithuania, Malta, Croatia, Latvia, Italy and Portugal. In Germany an important commitment was made in the new German programme for government, to advance a Common Framework for minimum income at EU level.

Local level actors

One of the important and unexpected spin-offs from the EMIN2 Bus Trip which had many stops outside of capitals, was an increased engagement with local authorities (municipalities), local trade

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union branches and local civil society actors. ‘The day Europe came to our town’ was a memorable description that was given to one of these stops and captured the impact of giving time and attention to areas and places impacted by EU policies but often feeling distant to the EU institutions. Examples of this included engagement with 14th District in Budapest (Hungary), rural communities (Romania), regional county governors of Banska Bystrica, Žilina, Trnava and Bratislava (Slovakia), city administrations in Florence, Naples and Avellino (Italy), regional governments (Czechia), local municipalities (Iceland, Latvia), city mayor and local authority in Leicester (UK).

Other local links included: Links with Local Authority Networks and local organisations (G40 – cities not including the big four cities in Netherlands), local coordinators to support people in need (Czechia), Social Welfare Centres from different regions (Poland), Social Security Institute of Oporto district (Portugal), strong engagement with Regional Authorities (Spain), members of the local administration managing Social Inclusion Income (Italy), Local Muslim community organisation, Indian Workers’ Association and the Trades Council (UK). In France the Bus Trip facilitated stronger engagement with local networks.

National parliaments and European institutions

There was a considerable increase in the engagement and cooperation with national parliaments. This was highlighted in Slovakia, Germany, Spain and the UK. Increased interaction with political parties was noted in Ireland and Latvia.

Members of the European Parliament continued as champions for the EMIN work. There was a good engagement of MEPs at the launch of the EMIN bus trip and also at stops on the journey as highlighted in Malta, Germany, Portugal, Latvia and Slovakia. There was also extensive cooperation with the European Parliament’s 2017 resolution on Minimum Income Policies as a tool for fighting poverty and also their report on European Pillar of Social Rights. Ongoing briefings were given to MEPs on the progress of the project.

Engagement with the European Economic and Social Committee was maintained throughout the project. There was considerable interaction with regards to their drafting of the initiative report on an EU framework directive on Minimum Income.

Trade unions and civil society

In the EMIN1 project the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) was a partner. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) agreed to participate as a partner in the EMIN2 project. The presence of ETUC strengthened the articulation of the connection between decent Minimum Income Schemes and the quality of paid work.

The presence of ETUC supported engagement with national trade unions, and it gave stronger political weight to the work of the EMIN2 project. Much stronger interaction with trade unions at national level was reported in the UK, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Iceland, Luxembourg, Poland, Germany and Romania.

EMIN continued to have support of EU level civil society organisations who showed goodwill towards the Bus Trip. The Social Platform were very engaged in the Bus launch events. While the Bus awareness tour strengthened the engagement with national civil society organisations it was hard to get commitment from individuals from EU organisations to engage in this action.

Facilitating NGO speakers from other countries to take part in national events was considered important.

EAPN plays a crucial role within the EMIN network. As coordinator and one of the key partners it has provided substantial inputs for the work of EMIN. This has been achieved through a clear link made

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between EAPN's EU Inclusion Strategies Group and EMIN. The national networks of EAPN are in many countries already a substantial gathering of the NGOs involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and are the nucleus of national EMIN networks providing key knowledge and expertise. From this starting point national networks then engage other relevant actors to be actively engaged in EMIN. In general, the engagement of other actors has been more successful when it is developed around concrete projects, such as, the Bus Trip or a national campaign aimed at forthcoming elections, or a key conference. Much of this work is voluntary, based on the belief that we need to build a more social Europe as part of the effort to fight poverty and social exclusion and to build a European Union that has the trust of its citizens.

Broadening the range of civil society actors cooperating with national EMIN networks was particularly noted in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia.

Links to other actors

Part of the ambition of the EMIN2 project was to try and engage actors not normally engaged in such activities. The notion of engaging EMIN ambassadors was seen as a success in a number of countries including, Slovakia, Estonia and Slovenia. Ombudspersons, Chancellor of Justice and Equality Commissioner, former European Commissioners, well-known local artists, singers and actors, musicians – Eurovision entrants, children's book authors, choirs, were mobilised to be involved. These involvements were often linked to the Bus Trip.

There was a notable increase in engagement with young people including creative engagement with schools (Estonia, Slovakia); students (Hungary, Malta, Portugal and Slovakia) and young people more generally (Romania).

Church and faith-based organisations were also noticeably engaged in the EMIN project, including at the launch of the Bus Tour but also in Sweden and Slovakia and a stop in Taizé Community in France.

Indeed, the Bus Tour and the positive messages about minimum income and the benefit good quality schemes brings to everybody allowed for positive engagement with the general public.

Seeking to sustain the EMIN Network

From what is written above you can see that in the EMIN2 project there was a significant consolidation of the partners who had already engaged in EMIN1 at EU level. Even more so, in almost all countries there was a real consolidation of the actors already involved in EMIN1 and in many countries there was a vast enlargement of the partners engaged to the EMIN work. The activity of the bus proved in many countries to be a stimulus to engaging other partners. This brought the lesson that in terms of engaging other actors and particularly less obvious 'voices', rather than seeking to engage actors in the notion of an 'EMIN Network' it is more likely to have success if we try to engage them in key EMIN activities that are time limited and can attract attention.

The partners at European level are committed to try and sustain EMIN beyond the life of the EMIN2 project. EAPN has a key role in that and is committed to maintain decent Minimum Income Schemes as a key policy area for its work. EAPN is also committed to try and sustain the EMIN Network. Together the partners are identifying a minimal set of activities that could be sustained even without funding. However, they are very aware that without specific funding the chances to sustain a very visible and effective EMIN that can build on the momentum generated in this period are low. Therefore they are also committed to seek funding opportunities to sustain the work in the future and to cooperate as much as possible in funding opportunities that might become available.

Even more so at country level key people involved are eager to build on the work of the EMIN2 project. However, in a situation where little funding is available for civil society and their base organisations are either voluntary or have insecure funding, it is hard to secure funding for national EMIN work. On the bright side at least two national networks have succeeded in this task but it is important to say that the joint work at European level is a lever for accessing these funds. So there is an inter-dependence between securing EU and national level funds.

From the beginning of EMIN we have tried to ensure that with the key actors we engage, including the European and National level partners, that this topic is integrated into their own key concerns. This is the best way to ensure that the momentum built is sustained beyond the life of the project and is the essential base for future cooperation.

4.2 Awareness raising

The key activity to raise awareness and raise public support for decent Minimum Income Schemes, during the EMIN2 project was the organisation of the **European-wide awareness raising bus journey**. Two buses travelled through 32 countries (separate buses were used for Iceland and Cyprus) over 64 days with more than 120 events programmed. At the stops in the countries, activists talked with politicians, administrations, officials, civil society organisations and the general public about the importance of adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes.

Clarification of terms

Part of the awareness raising was to explain what is meant by Minimum Income Schemes, often referred to as social assistance schemes or cash transfer schemes for people with little or no financial means. It was important to situate Minimum Income Schemes as part of a wider social protection and social assistance framework and to articulate the link to employment. The theme of the Bus Tour was Guaranteed Minimum Income. We argued for inclusive labour markets where good quality jobs paying living wages could guarantee adequate income but we concentrated on the role of Minimum Income Schemes in ensuring guaranteed adequate income for those not in employment and who have used up their entitlements to unemployment benefit, for those who cannot access paid work, or as top-up to those in low-paid or part-time employment to reach adequate income to participate actively in society and support re-entry to sustained paid work. There was also the constant need to explain the difference between the concepts of Adequate Minimum Income and Universal Basic Income/Citizen Income. There was also the need to differentiate between Minimum Income and Minimum Wages which often get confused especially in translation between different languages.

Awareness of realities on the ground

The Bus Tour was also an enormous opportunity to build awareness of the realities on the ground in the different European Countries. With two buses we covered over 25.000 kilometres, visiting 32 Countries, over 64 days, with over 120 programmes and the involvement of more than 1000 volunteers. It was a great voyage of discovery to get to know realities in Europe, not only the difference and commonalities between countries but also within countries and trying to create a Europe not only of capitals but also of regions and local territories. The day-to-day journey can be viewed on www.eminbus.eu. The Bus was also a creative event and learning journey that energised debate and brought a positive view of EU to citizens. We already knew a lot from our national EMIN teams. Detailed reports of the realities in each country can be found on www.emin-eu.net. However, meeting and talking with people in all corners of Europe brings the information to light in a different way.

Some **key messages** that emerged from the trip included:

The need to trust people needing access to Minimum Income Support: A representative from a trade union in Denmark asked the question, ‘when and why did we stop trusting people who receive social assistance?’ Trust is central to creating adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes. Trust that people, in or at risk of poverty, have the intelligence to know how and which opportunities to take, the willingness and creativity to contribute to society and the desire to do meaningful work. If the system does not show trust in them, how can they trust the system? In many countries the minimum income scheme seemed to be designed more to respond to the suspicion that people are trying to cheat the system rather than on enabling people to access their right to adequate income support so that they can live in dignity.

We have to protect what we have: A powerful testimony in Portugal demonstrated that even when Minimum Income Schemes are far from adequate, they can be a lifeline to keep food on the table and to be able to maintain children in school. In many countries Minimum Income does lift people out of deeper poverty. In the better performing countries, we heard stories of how Minimum Income can enable people to remain active in the society and reconnect to the world of work. While campaigning for decent schemes we need also to protect what we already have. It is important to note that we did hear of examples of efforts to improve Minimum Income Schemes in several countries, outlined earlier in this report. The introduction of national schemes in Italy and Greece is widely welcomed but they are still far from comprehensive or adequate.

The situation is intolerable in many countries: In some countries, including, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia and Romania, the conditions to access are so difficult and/or the levels of the benefit are so inadequate that these schemes exist more virtually than in reality. We also heard many examples of the additional problems in rural areas where services are severely limited or almost non-existent. There is discrimination against, or lack of provision for, Roma communities, lone parents, large families, people with disabilities and people in rural areas. Such schemes in a common European Union are intolerable.

Decent Minimum Income Schemes have to be part of a wider package of social standards: Time and again we heard how decent Minimum Income Schemes have to be a part of a wider package that involves decent social protection systems, access to and links between social and employment services, quality work and just tax systems. The evolution of working poor and low-level wages and the impact this has on driving down or preventing progress on achieving decent Minimum Income Schemes was stressed in many countries. The lack of affordable housing and the severe impact of tourism and high skilled mobile workers on the cost of housing was stressed in many countries including: Hungary, Spain, Estonia, Romania, Cyprus, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, France and Portugal. The adequacy of the Minimum Income in all countries is very much related to housing situation and/or whether housing support is available in addition to Minimum Income.

Increased conditionality and ‘workfare’ are having perverse effects: In some countries exaggerated conditions and forced activation have turned the schemes into obstacle courses rather than springboards for active engagement in society and the world of work (UK, Croatia, Italy, Spain, Lithuania, Romania, Latvia and Finland). The extensive use of ‘activation’ in Denmark has resulted in for example, many shop-floor workers in large supermarket chains being paid with social assistance money and of course eliminating these positions as jobs that might be available for unemployed people. Workfare in Hungary has resulted in people in jobs cleaning public areas without minimal health and safety conditions being met. We have also observed the self-defeating practice that to access Minimum Income Schemes you have to first go deep in poverty (divest yourself of existing assets) before you qualify for minimum income (UK, Austria, Sweden, Latvia...) making the road back to recovery even harder and ignoring the reality that prevention is better and cheaper than cure.

Resilience and energy of people experiencing poverty and local groups and associations: Perhaps the abiding memory of the Bus Trip was the energy and creativity of people experiencing poverty and their local groups and associations. This included creative campaigning in Hungary, vibrant community centres in the UK, Italy and Estonia, theatre performance in Austria, Croatia and Spain, Housing First approaches in Portugal and Finland, micro-credit solutions in France, activating communities in the Netherlands, multi-dimensional approaches in food banks in Poland and discussions in seniors' organisations in Latvia. Minimum Income Schemes need to be tapping into this energy and creativity and working with rather than against the people concerned.

Awareness of EU actions

Opportunities were also taken to disseminate information about the key commitments and developments in relation Minimum Income at EU level. These include:

- The follow-up of the 1992 Recommendation on Adequate Income and the 2008 Recommendation on Active Inclusion
- The inclusion of the right to adequate income as one of the 20 rights in the European Pillar of Social Rights
- The attention given to Minimum Income in the 'Semester' process and in the Country-Specific Recommendations that are key to that process
- The possibility to use funds from the European Social Fund to improve the infrastructure for the delivery of Minimum Income Schemes
- The development of the benchmarking exercise on Minimum Income the European Social Protection Committee.

Developing and disseminating positive messages in relation to Minimum Income

Key messages were developed for delivery as part of the awareness raising tour. These messages were further developed by the national EMIN2 teams for use in the different national contexts. The messages helped to move from a dominant 'negative narrative' in relation to Minimum Income Schemes to look at the positive contribution adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes could play not just for the people who benefit directly but also for the wider society. The messages proved robust in relation to strengthening the resolve of those favourably disposed towards adequate Minimum Income Schemes and towards engaging people (politicians, administrators, opinion formers...) who were open but may be less informed or less sure of the positive role that can be played by adequate Minimum Income Schemes. The messages also prompted more urgency to move towards well designed and adequate Minimum Income Schemes as it became clearer that such schemes work best while poor quality schemes can be self-fulfilling about the way people can get trapped in long term need or stuck in cycles of dependency on minimum income support.

The messages developed for the Bus awareness raising tour stressed the many good reasons why adequate Minimum Income Schemes are good for people and for society. The messages developed were:

- The strap-line *Guaranteed Minimum Income, nobody deserves less, everybody benefits*, which reinforces the EMIN emphasis on a **positive approach** to achieving adequate minimum income
- Adequate Minimum income benefits are essential to guarantee **human rights**, whereas denying people access to adequate income constitutes a violation of human rights
- Adequate Minimum Income Schemes ensure that people who need them can remain **active in society**, help them reconnect to the world of work and allow them to **live in dignity**
- Adequate Minimum Income Schemes are more likely to **speed up integration** into sustainable and quality employment, while inadequate Minimum Income Schemes are likely to lock people in a cycle of dependency and undermine pathways to social inclusion and cohesion

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- They are indispensable for **more equal societies** and to ensure social cohesion, which is beneficial for the whole of society
- Minimum Income Schemes represent a very small percentage of social spending and have a **high return on investment**, while the cost of non-investment has enormous negative impacts for individuals concerned and high long-term costs for society
- As the basis for high quality social protection systems, they act as **‘economic stabilizers’**: countries with high-quality social protection systems are better able to resist negative impacts of crises and help to reduce damaging inequalities which undermine social cohesion
- They are **cost effective economic stimulus packages**, as the money involved immediately re-enters the economy and often in areas experiencing the impacts of market failure
- Because of the interaction between benefits and wage levels, adequate Minimum Income Schemes can play a positive role to help ensure decent wages and **reverse the destructive trend of rising numbers of ‘working poor’** in Europe.

Ongoing awareness raising work

Opportunities to deliver similar messages and activities were ongoing in the EMIN2 project. Through the activities and events organised by the National EMIN teams. Also we responded to request for interventions at many EU level events.

The main EMIN website www.emin-eu.net was maintained and updated as a source of information for ‘specialists’ working on the topic of minimum income or related topics. The www.emin-bus.eu website had the ambition to reach a more general audience interested in the topic.

A final newsletter of the EMIN2 project will aim at a wide dissemination of the key materials developed during the EMIN2 project:

- Report and Recommendations from the Peer Review on Non-Take-Up of Minimum Income Schemes
- Report and Recommendations from the Peer Review on Reference Budgets
- Report and Recommendations from the Peer Review on Active Inclusion
- Final Report and Revised EU Road Map of the EMIN2 project
- Electronic book of the blog of the EMIN Bus awareness raising tour

4.3 Policy Advocacy

EU Policy Framework on Minimum Income Schemes

Over the past 30 years, the European institutions have been building a policy framework to tackle poverty and social exclusion. In doing so they have emphasised the importance of adequate minimum income support within active inclusion policies for ensuring a decent life for all within the European Union.

Key milestones for the progressive realisation of adequate and accessible Minimum Income Schemes are: the **1992 Council Recommendation** on sufficient resources and social assistance in the EU, the **2008 Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion**, the **2010 Europe 2020 Strategy**, setting a specific target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020, the **2010 European Year Against Poverty**, launching the European Flagship Platform Against Poverty, the **2013 Social Investment Package**, where the Commission voiced its ambition to

give guidance to the Member States on upgrading active inclusion strategies, including through establishing reference budgets to help design efficient and adequate income support.

Several EU institutions and civil society networks at EU level support the demand by EMIN for European action for the realisation of adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes in Europe. The **European Parliament** in several resolutions supported the establishment of an EU target for MIS, providing income support of at least 60% of median income and a timetable to reach that goal. In some of its resolutions, the Parliament called on the Commission to launch a consultation on the possibility of a legislative initiative on minimum income. In its most recent position on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Parliament supports the idea of an EU initiative on minimum income. The **Committee of Regions** as well as the **European Economic and Social Committee** support the idea of a framework directive on minimum income, and the latter calls on the Commission to examine funding possibilities.

EAPN has carried out a long-standing campaign on adequate minimum income since 2000, including a campaign in 2010 as part of its coordination on the EU year against poverty; the development of a legal opinion and working paper on a European framework directive on minimum income and coordinated work with the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, on all the major reports and initiatives. Through its EU Inclusion Strategies Group, it has prioritised minimum income as a key priority in its monitoring of Social Rights and the delivery on the poverty target through the European Semester. In its follow-up work on the Social Pillar it has selected principle 14 on minimum income as 1 of 5 core principals essential for the delivery on cutting poverty through implementation of social rights and proposed 'ambitious legislation to guarantee rights to adequate social protection and minimum income for all'.²³

As part of an overall policy to strengthen social protection systems, the **ETUC** calls in the Manifesto for a European framework directive on an adequate **minimum income** that establishes common principles, definitions and methods for Minimum Income Schemes in the Member States, combining income support with active inclusion and access to quality services.

The **Social Platform** in its position on adequate minimum income calls for the adoption of an EU framework directive on Adequate Minimum Income Schemes that establishes common principles, definitions and methods, to achieve a level playing field across Europe.

The **European Council** called for a renewed focus to deliver on the **poverty** and employment **target** as well on **adequacy and coverage of social protection systems throughout the life cycle, to prevent poverty and social exclusion**. The **Social Protection Committee** has taken a key role to support the focus on adequacy of minimum income, including through the Indicators Sub group, looking also a benchmarking and development of new policy as well as outcome indicators.

The right to an adequate minimum income in the European Pillar of Social Rights²⁴.

In November 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights was proclaimed by all EU institutions at a Social Summit for Fair jobs and Growth in Gothenburg, Sweden. The European Pillar of Social Rights

²³ EAPN (Sept 2017) Make Social Rights the beating heart of Europe! EAPN response to the European Pillar of Social Rights.

²⁴ **European Commission**, Communication from the Commission Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights, Brussels 26 April 2017, Com (2017) 250 final, and SWD (2017) 200 final, SWD (2017) 201 final, SWD (2017) 206 final; **Council of the European Union**, Proposal for an Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights, 13129/17, Brussels, 20 October 2017

provides the most recent framework for work on adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes.

The Pillar reaffirms the rights that already exist at EU and international level. By way of a recommendation, these rights and principles are put together to give them more visibility and to establish a framework for guiding future actions of the Union and the Member States. The rights and principles are not directly enforceable but require translation into action and/or legislation, at the level of the Union or the Member States. The European Semester is seen as an important instrument to monitor developments and promote targeted reforms. Benchmarking will be used in areas particularly relevant for the Eurozone, such as unemployment benefits, minimum wages and minimum income.

The Pillar is structured around three categories of rights and principles, one of these is social protection and inclusion. The Communication states that it is important that “an effective social protection system is in place to protect the most vulnerable in society, including a ‘social protection floor’. On minimum income, the Recommendation states that *“Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market.”*

The staff working document refers to the Union acquis in art. 34(3) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union that recognizes, inter alia, the right to social assistance to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources in accordance with the rules laid down by Union law and national laws and practices. It refers to the legislative powers of the Union and its limits: according to art. 153(2) of TFEU the Union is empowered to adopt measures to support and complement the activities of Member States, including in the field of integration of persons excluded from the labour market. Although the document does not mention the possibility of EU law, the fact that it refers to ‘integration of people excluded from the labour market’, leaves the door open for further advocacy, as initiated through the EAPN Working document from 2010²⁵.

In general, EMIN welcomes the inclusion of the right to adequate minimum income through the life-cycle as one of the 20 rights and principles of the Pillar. The follow-up on this right through the use of the European Semester is welcomed, but EMIN persists in its position taken during the first EMIN project, that an EU law should enforce the right. EMIN supports the idea to use the European Funds to support the implementation of the rights in the Social Pillar, but stresses that to secure the long-term sustainability of funding for adequate minimum income, especially in countries under financial adjustment programmes, additional resources are needed to guarantee funding of all welfare provisions.

Concerned with the narrow definition of incentives to reintegrate into the labour market, pointing only at the design of the benefit to preserve financial incentives to take up a job, EMIN proposes a rewording of the right to minimum income in line with the Active Inclusion Recommendation, referring to inclusive labour markets policies and access to quality services.

The existing policy framework on minimum income at European Level can be reinforced if the **European Pillar of Social Rights** will be implemented through an ambitious roadmap, using all possible instruments at European level to realize the social rights: a socialized European Semester, targeting of EU funding but also hard law on the right to a decent minimum income for all.

²⁵ Van Lancker Anne, Working document on a framework directive on minimum income, EAPN September 2010; art 153, 1, h, allows the EU to support the activities of Member States in the field of integration of people excluded from the labour market; art. 153 (2) foresees that legislation is a possible option for intervention at EU level.

The European Semester and Minimum Income

Until today, the main tool at EU level to influence Member States' policy regarding minimum income is through the European Semester. EMIN aims not at duplicating the work of its members but at giving greater visibility to their work and ensuring coherence between the different partners in EMIN in relation to their work on Minimum Income. Given the central importance of the Semester to achieving progress on decent Minimum Income Schemes and the track record of EAPN of working on the semester from a social inclusion perspective the following section is based on recent assessments by EAPN of the 2018 Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) and the 2017 National Reform Programmes (NRP).

In recent years, improvements were made with regards to references to social policy and poverty assessments in the Country Specific Recommendations, the Country Reports and the Annual Growth Survey (AGS). But positive recommendations to improve adequacy, coverage or take-up of MIS are still too weak and there is a general lack of coherence with the analysis and recommendations that are merely austerity oriented.

In its assessment of CSRs 2018²⁶, EAPN is of the opinion that they were launched with a more positive social rhetoric and a notable attempt to rebalance the economic objectives in the presentation. The overall Communication makes the European Pillar of Social Rights clearly visible, but without concrete results for social rights. Positive is that the Communication has a paragraph dedicated to social transfers and access to services, but the focus is on cost effectiveness and efficiency of social spending and lacks recommendations on how to increase the effectiveness of social protection schemes in reducing poverty. The social scoreboard shows low effectiveness of tax/benefits systems in reducing poverty and inequality in 13 countries, but the Country-Specific Recommendations contain a reference to this problem in only 2 countries.

More emphasis on poverty and decent MIS, but lack of coherence with demands for rationalization of social protection

There is a significant number of **so-called 'Poverty' CSRs in 2018**, but there is little coherence. **13 MS** receive CSRs on 'poverty' (**AT, BE, BG, EE, ES, FR, HR, HU, LT, LV, RO, SI, SK**), two more compared to 2017. However, it is not always easy to understand the criteria used for assigning these as 'poverty' CSRs nor to see how they will reduce poverty. The countries mentioned are not always the worst-performing countries, and often concrete policy measures are missing. When measures are proposed, they are mostly related to employment policy and education. What is missing is a reference to integrated anti-poverty strategies based on the active inclusion strategy, ensuring access to adequate minimum income and social protection, quality services and inclusive labour markets.

On **Minimum Income and Social Protection** more specifically, the CSRs 2018 show a sustained priority on adequacy of minimum income but this priority is undermined by demands for rationalization of social protection systems. **In 2018**, 6 Member States receive CSRs on minimum income (**BG, EE, ES, LV, HU, RO**) but leaving behind other countries where a universal measure of minimum income is still missing (IT). 4 of these include an explicit focus on **adequacy (BG, EE, LV, HU)**, and 3 on **coverage (BG, HU, ES)**. For other countries, quality of Minimum Income Schemes is sometimes addressed in the preamble, but without policy recommendations. In many cases the attention for adequate minimum income is also undermined by priority given to budget sustainability, consolidation of social protection benefits or increasing targeting and focusing of support on those most in need. The EAPN assessment is also concerned by the low priority that is

²⁶ EAPN, More audacity to fight poverty and inequality? EAPN assessment of Country-Specific Recommendations 2018, Brussels, June 2018

given to the right to essential services, and by the fact that inclusive labour markets that can integrate vulnerable people get only limited attention.

As almost no minimum incomes schemes in the EU actually take people out of poverty, EAPN continues to expect CSRs on adequacy of minimum income, especially in countries showing shockingly low levels of minimum income. The European Semester should be used more convincingly to make progress towards levels of benefits that ensure a life free of poverty in all countries.

Poverty and the poverty target still not being taken seriously by Member States

In their **2017 National Reform Programmes**, nearly all Member States include a specific section analysing progress on the poverty target in response to the Commission's guidance. But EAPN members²⁷ highlight the predominant focus on macroeconomic priorities in the NRPs, with social concerns too often side-lined and with low visibility of the poverty target of the Europe 2020 strategy. Although some members see a more explicit social narrative in some countries with more attention to poverty and social exclusion, the majority of members are disappointed about the limited role of the NRPs, that are not seen as an opportunity to develop an action plan to achieve the poverty target. EAPN teams point to the general overall **lack of seriousness around poverty reduction**, both in terms of **setting inadequate poverty targets and inadequate policy responses**, which continues to undermine the coherence of the Europe 2020 poverty target delivery. There is a wide variation of the approaches towards delivery on the poverty target. This underlines the problem of the lack of a clear, consensus on an integrated rights-based strategy at EU and national level to fight poverty and social exclusion. Where poverty has been reduced, there is little critical analysis of the real impact and for specific groups.

In a few countries, the 'poverty' targets have already been met (DE, CZ, RO and PL); this is seen as due to the choice of the indicator or the unambitious target setting. Countries where increases are noted, fall far short of an urgent analysis of causes and solutions (BE, LT, CY, ES, EL and UK).

The majority of EAPN members see **few signs of social rights being mainstreamed** in the NRPs; only in a few countries there is some reference to rights (BE, PT, SE). They also indicate that jobs are seen as the main route out of poverty, regardless of the quality of the job or whether people are able to work or access the jobs.

At this moment, the **European Semester** provides the main tool to influence Member States' policy regarding minimum income; it's role will even increase in the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights' delivery. However, to make that real evidence shows that the semester and its instruments will need to be made much more socially oriented, with more emphasis on the importance of decent MIS. Also the coherence with macroeconomic policy will have to be considerably improved. How this can be done, is developed in the EU roadmap (see next section below).

²⁷ EAPN assessment of NRP 2017 (October 2017) <http://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/EAPN-2017-EAPN-Report-Assessment-National-Reform-Programmes-1323.pdf>

Part II: A renewed EU roadmap for progressive realisation of adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes in Europe

Key messages of the renewed EU Roadmap

Maintain and build further a public campaign to advocate for decent Minimum Income Schemes across Europe, based on the fact that these don't only profit for people who need them, but also for the whole of society, showing the social, economic and other costs of not ensuring adequate income.

Ensure monitoring and implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including the right to a decent minimum income, by transforming the European Semester into a European Semester for Sustainable Development, underpinned by the sustainable development goals, with social and environmental objectives on a par with economic goals. Tangible benchmarks should be used to assess countries performance on adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes in the framework of integrated active inclusion strategies, resulting in Country Specific Recommendations;

European funds should be used to support attainment of the social right to a decent minimum income; the partnership with civil society organisation should be fully exploited and resourced.

In the post Europe 2020 strategy, a new more ambitious poverty target should be established based on a common percentage for all Member States as part of a progressive realisation of poverty reduction, monitored through the Semester.

If after thorough evaluation of the Europe 2020 strategy, the poverty target would prove to be insufficiently attained, **a European framework directive should be developed to translate the right to a decent minimum income into a legally binding commitment for all Member States**, based on common definitions of adequacy, common efforts to improve access and reduce non-take-up, and ensuring a coherent active inclusion approach, combining adequate income support, access to inclusive labour markets and to quality services that support people to participate in society.

Guaranteed minimum income benefits constitute the basic income floor for decent income for all. The right to adequate, accessible and enabling minimum income benefits should be part of more comprehensive social protections floors in the EU Member States. They should also include a floor for decent minimum wages. The upcoming German Presidency of the European Council during the second half of 2020, promoting basic social protection systems in all Member States, will present an excellent opportunity to continue this campaign.

In line with the principle in the European Pillar of Social Rights, that there is a need to create a more solid environment to ensure continuous commitment to the creation of 'adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity'. The European Commission should consider investing in a continuation of a cross-sectoral minimum income network such as EMIN while ensuring support for the functioning of a network of National Public Authorities responsible for Minimum Income Schemes and for the European Network of researchers on Reference Budgets. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a European Observatory on Minimum Income which would support, monitor and regularly report on the developments in relation to Minimum Income Schemes.

1. Awareness raising and public debate

The campaign that was developed under EMIN2 on adequate Minimum Income Schemes must be continued and developed, based on **human rights of citizens** contained in the Treaty of the EU and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and on the commitments by Council and Commission on adequate minimum income.

Adequate Minimum Income is an **income that is indispensable to live a life in dignity and to fully participate in society**. This campaign should lead to a commitment by Member States to achieve the **progressive realization** of adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes as part of **comprehensive social protection systems**. Addressing **tax justice and redistribution** is needed to ensure financial sustainability.

There are many good reasons why adequate Minimum Income Schemes are good for people and for society. Adequate Minimum Income Schemes ensure that people who need them can remain **active in society**, help them reconnect to the world of work and allow them to **live in dignity**. They are indispensable for **more equal societies** and more equal societies perform better for the whole of society. As the basis for high quality social protection systems, they act as '**economic stabilizers**'; countries with high quality social protection systems are better able to resist negative impacts of crisis and help to reduce damaging inequalities which undermine social cohesion.

Minimum Income Schemes represent a very small percentage of social spending and have a **high return on investment**, while the cost of non-investment has enormous negative impacts for individuals concerned and high long-term costs for society. They are **cost effective economic stimulus packages**, as the money involved immediately re-enters the economy and often in areas experiencing the impacts of market failure. Because of the interaction between benefits and wage levels, adequate Minimum Income Schemes can play a positive role in **reversing the destructive trend of rising numbers of 'working poor'** in Europe. Adequate Minimum Income Schemes are more likely to speed up integration into sustainable and quality employment, while inadequate Minimum Income Schemes are likely to lock people in a cycle of dependency and undermine pathways to social inclusion and cohesion.

To illustrate the potential benefits of and the means required to develop good quality Minimum Income Schemes, **comparative research** should be carried out to provide evidence for the business case. Research should include current and **potential costs for an adequate minimum income** and how this could be funded, rebalancing public budgets and clarifying the **support through EU funding**. This should be linked to an overall campaign around increasing investment in social protection in the Member States.

2. Implement the right to an adequate minimum income on the basis of the European Pillar of Social Rights, using the European Semester and EU funds

It is no longer viable to develop national social policy without considering the European perspective. **Common EU level efforts are needed** to help achieve high social standards. Citizens are strongly attached to the European Social Model. Convergence of living costs is growing without similar convergence of levels of social benefits and wages. This is leading to a highly divided Europe with growing poverty and inequality resulting in loss of solidarity and growing distrust of democratic institutions.

The proposals we make here are based on mainstreaming the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the present system, particularly the Europe 2020 strategy developed through the European Semester. The elements we propose will need to be present also in the post 2020 strategy, to ensure coherence with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The revised European Semester and the post 2020 EU strategy must have a clear space to follow up the Social Pillar, including on the right to an adequate minimum income. Maintaining a clear and more ambitious and coherent poverty target within the overarching EU strategy will be essential to ensure visibility and high-level attention for these social concerns.

We welcome the Inter-Institutional Proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at the Social Summit in Gothenburg. This high-level commitment to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, including the right to an adequate minimum income, ensuring a life in dignity across all stages of life for everyone lacking sufficient resources, and the right to effective access to enabling goods and services, must mark a new beginning in EU cooperation to achieve high level social standards across the EU Member States. To ensure implementation of these rights, all possible Community instruments should be used.

Following the proclamation of the Pillar, the European institutions should **urgently agree a road map**²⁸, setting out in detail how the EU institutions can support implementation, including on the right to minimum income. This roadmap should include implementation through the transformation of the European Semester into a **European Semester for Sustainable Development**, with social and environmental objectives at the same level as economic goals. The roadmap should set out the objectives, key actions, the role of key institutions and stakeholders, with detailed timelines and guidelines, detailing how all the principles and Europe 2020 targets are to be monitored and delivered - in the Annual Growth Survey, the delivery of the National Reform Programmes, the Country Reports and Country Specific Recommendations, on a par with economic proposals and ensuring that economic objectives are coherent with social rights. The Annual Growth Survey needs to be transformed into an Annual Survey for Social and Sustainable Development and published together with a Joint Employment and Social Development Report. This process should be linked to the delivery of the Social Pillar and include regular in-depth analyses of the state of play on poverty and social exclusion in Europe and of the contribution of social transfers to the fight against poverty, including minimum income systems in the European countries.

The commitment of the European Commission to **use the Country Specific Recommendations** within the European Semester in a sustained way can help to stimulate Member States to improve the adequacy and accessibility of their Minimum Income Schemes.

²⁸ See *Make Social Rights the beating heart of Europe!* EAPN response to the European Pillar of Social Rights. www.eapn.eu from which this section draws many of its proposals.

All social rights and principles of the European Pillar should be covered by adequate headline indicators as part of the social scoreboard. To that purpose, an **action plan and a timetable** should be set out, highlighting the existing gaps in the actual range of social indicators and developing new relevant indicators through a participatory process involving civil society actors. Core priorities are: to keep the full range of Europe 2020 indicators on poverty, but to ensure that they are monitored separately, and to consider additional indicators, to better capture extreme poverty, child poverty and in-work poverty. Coherence should be ensured with existing mechanisms, such as the Social Protection Performance Monitor and the Employment Performance Monitor, by using these as secondary indicators. To monitor gender equality, the EIGE gender equality index should be used.

The **social scoreboard** should not only track trends and performances across EU countries, it should also be used as a basis for developing **tangible benchmarks** for Member States that are core to preventing and combating poverty and social exclusion. These benchmarks should at least cover adequacy of minimum income systems, unemployment benefits²⁹ and other social protection benefits. Currently, the EU Commission uses two indicators in order to assess the adequacy of minimum income protection: (1) the income of minimum income beneficiaries as a share of the national poverty threshold (over 3 years) (2) the income of minimum income beneficiaries as a share of the income of a low wage earner (earning 50% of average wages).

The EU Commission should create a **panel of experts**, including SPC members, NGOs, social partners and people experiencing poverty, to discuss common principles and definitions of what constitutes an adequate minimum income. The benchmarking exercise should also capture developments in minimum wages and their links to 'living' wages. The benchmarks should inform the development of Country Specific Recommendations (including recommendations on adequate and accessible Minimum Income Schemes) and the National Reform Programmes. A clear mechanism should be established to activate automatic policy recommendations when certain thresholds are not met. Monitoring of progress supported by the new social scoreboard and exchange of best practices in areas such as the right to adequate minimum income, and through peer reviews (under the Social OMC) should contribute to assessing Member States' efforts to deliver progress, including on the Europe 2020 poverty reduction target. Civil society and social partner stakeholders should be involved in this process.

The **Social Protection Committee** should regularly report and make recommendations to the EPSCO Ministers on progress on achieving the adequacy and accessibility of Minimum Income Schemes, so that it can feed into Council conclusions as part of integrated active inclusion and adequate financing of universal social protection systems.

The European Commission should ensure **coherence** between the different European Semester instruments and thus should use the social rights included in the EPSR, including the right to an adequate MI, to assess measures and reforms recommended in the macro-economic policy recommendations and/or planned in the National Reform Programmes. **Participatory social impact assessments** should be made to prevent potential negative impact and to ensure coherence of macroeconomic policies in the delivery of social rights and poverty reduction, including fiscal flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact to increase social investment to guarantee these social rights.

A meaningful **engagement of the Social Partners, of civil society, including people experiencing poverty**, should be guaranteed and adequately resourced at national and at European level, to contribute to the European Semester and other related processes, with new concrete guidelines and

²⁹ On Minimum Income a benchmarking exercise was done in SPC. EMCO is doing a similar exercise for Unemployment Benefits

resources implementing Recital 11 of the new Employment Guidelines which recognizes civil society as a key partner in the European Semester.

The intention of the Commission to further **use the European Funds to support the implementation of the rights in the European Social Pillar** and to use the Pillar as a reference for the post 2020 financial programming period deserve our support. Member States should prioritize delivery and commit to allocate at least **30% of the new ESF+ for social inclusion** in their Operational Programmes, support coordinated use of the new ESF+ and ERDF and monitor effectiveness. ‘Social inclusion’ should be interpreted in a broad sense, beyond only pathways to work and activation, to enable a wide range of measures that contribute to participation of vulnerable people in the society particularly using an **integrated active inclusion approach** as required by the ex-ante conditionalities. There should be increased clarity about the role of the funds for social inclusion and social participation for those who cannot be expected to enter the labour market, due to age, sickness, disability or other reasons. Further work should be done on the definition of social inclusion used for this purpose and on the indicators to measure progress towards inclusion and social participation and not only insertion to any paid work, to better ensure that the social inclusion ring-fencing achieves clear benefits for those in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The **partnership principle** should be enforced to ensure better targeting of the funds and access to the funds by grass-root NGOs and other relevant partners and support for technical assistance and other mechanisms. The European Commission should also support countries by documenting **good practices** in the use of European Structural and Investment Funds for social inclusion including civil society partnership

3. An EU directive on adequate Minimum Income Schemes: why and what?

Soft law on its own will not be enough to effectively enforce the right to a decent minimum income. We therefore reiterate our ambition to achieve legally binding measures through a European framework directive. Building on the existing 1992 Council Recommendation on minimum income and on the 2008 Commission Recommendation on active inclusion, a legally enforceable right to adequate and accessible minimum income benefits could help to deliver on the commitments to drastically reduce poverty and social exclusion in the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy and the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Neither the 1992 Recommendation nor the Active Inclusion Recommendation (2008) has delivered sufficiently after all these years, and the results of the ‘socialized European Semester’ in terms of strong recommendations and commitments in the field of poverty and minimum income are still relatively disappointing. As the **Europe 2020 strategy** is coming close to the end of its deadline, a **thorough evaluation** must be conducted of the strategy and its headline target on the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and of the impact of the existing governance tool at EU level to help achieve the goal of reducing by at least 20 million, the number of people living in poverty or social exclusion. The post Europe2020 strategy must contribute to the achievement of the objective of drastically reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion in Europe, an objective that should be reflected in a new even more ambitious poverty target, based on a common percentage of poverty reduction for all Member States.

If this objective of the Europe 2020 strategy has not been sufficiently achieved, it is clear that a new impulse in terms of governance will be needed to deliver upon the promises. For EMIN it is clear: a **new start and stronger base for action** and cooperation is needed. A Directive would give meaning to the **horizontal social clause**, to the article on combating social exclusion of the **Fundamental Rights Charter** and to the right for all to an adequate minimum income in the **European Pillar of**

Social Rights. A Directive would show **commitment to a Union of social values** and would help restore confidence.

There is a possible **Treaty Base** for such a Directive: TFEU - art 153.1.h on the integration of persons excluded from the labour market. The framework directive should contain provisions on the following:

- Common principles and definitions of what constitutes adequate Minimum Income Schemes
- A common methodology for defining adequacy
- Common approaches on coverage and efforts to facilitate take-up
- Common information requirements
- Common requirement for monitoring and evaluation
- The requirement for systematic updating mechanisms
- Requirement for independent bodies and procedures to adjudicate in cases of dispute between the administration and recipients
- Establishing the principle of the engagement of stakeholders including civil society organizations and people experiencing poverty and on minimum income in the monitoring, mutual learning, evaluation and development of Minimum Income Schemes

The Directive should be based on an **integrated Active Inclusion** approach combining access to adequate income, essential services and inclusive labour markets. The Directive should build on the knowledge and tools that have been developed since the 1992 Recommendation as well as the work that will be undertaken to implement the principle on minimum income under the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The common methodology for **defining adequacy of MI** should build on:

- The agreed at risk of poverty indicator, **60% of median equivalised income**, and the agreed new **material deprivation** indicators as national references and as a comparable indicator for adequacy
- A common EU-wide framework and methodology for reference budgets should be further developed and be used to contextualise the AROP threshold with a view to gain more insight in the kind of living standard the threshold represents in different countries.

Member States should be required to **evaluate** their MIS to avoid the creation of hidden poverty and to ensure better coverage and **take-up** by: reducing conditionality requirements and eliminating negative conditions and sanctions, increasing transparency, informing eligible benefit recipients actively about their rights, establishing simplified procedures and by putting in place policies to fight stigma and discrimination.

A **positive hierarchy** must be ensured with minimum wages to stimulate active inclusion and reverse the destructive trend of rising numbers of working poor. For people of **non-working age**, such as children or older people, adequate minimum income guarantees need to be introduced through adequate pensions and generous child benefit schemes.

While it is difficult to go directly from no or poor-quality Minimum Income Schemes to high level schemes, the directive should establish the ambition for the **progressive realisation** of adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes within agreed timetables and with explicit reporting mechanism on progress.

4. Guaranteed Minimum Income as the basic income floor for a decent income for all

In many policy documents regarding Minimum Income Schemes, it is clear that minimum income is considered as the **basic level of social protection systems**, on top of which other social protection benefits are defined for people in need of support.

The **Council Recommendation of 1992**, on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems, that recommends Member recognize the basic right of a person to sufficient resources and social assistance to live in a manner compatible with human dignity, states that implementation of such guarantee of resources comes within the sphere of social protection. The **2012 ILO Recommendation 202** concerning National Floors of Social Protection explicitly states that national social protection floors should at least comprise a set of basic social security guarantees, including 'basic income security at least at a nationally defined level, for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, alongside other social security benefits including pensions, unemployment benefits, health-care benefits or family benefits.

It is obvious that a **link must be made between adequate minimum income benefits and decent wages**. The **2008 Commission Recommendation of Active Inclusion** points to the need to design and implement an integrated comprehensive strategy for the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market combining adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services. Active inclusion policies should facilitate the integration into sustainable, quality employment of those who can work and provide resources which are sufficient to live in dignity, together with support for social participation, for those who cannot. The recommendation also points to the need to safeguard an incentive to seek employment for persons whose condition renders them fit for work. Research also shows that minimum wages act as a glass ceiling for benefits such as minimum income. To avoid the fact that low minimum wages would block efforts to ensure decent minimum income levels, campaigns should focus on decent income for all.

In their **campaigns**, **EAPN** as well as **ETUC**, are striving for adequate and accessible minimum income benefits, as part of a more comprehensive fight for decent social protection and for decent wages, that constitute essential instruments to ensure decent income for all.

In preparation for their **Presidency of the European Council** for the second half of 2020, the **Coalition Agreement of the German government of 14 March 2018** underscores the importance of a series of progressive reforms for social convergence, to prevent social dumping and to ensure better social cohesion. As part of this ambition, an initiative is being prepared to invite all Member States to put in place basic social protection systems, and to ensure transparent methods to determine and adapt the benefits in these basic social protection systems³⁰.

These plans constitute an excellent opportunity to continue the campaign for adequate and accessible Minimum Income Schemes as an essential commitment in the fight for a decent income for all.

³⁰ This initiative is currently discussed in a taskforce and has been accompanied by research papers: Prof Thorsten Kingreen, Ein verbindlichen EU-Rechtsrahmen für soziale Grundsicherungssystemen in den Mitgliedstaaten, Regensburg, July 2017; Prof. Björn Hacker, Germany's Options for European Policy Reform, FES, Berlin, 2018

5. A Solid Environment and Infrastructure to ensure progress

Finally, the EMIN2 project proposes, in line with the principle in the European Pillar of Social Rights, that there is a need to create a more solid environment to ensure continuous commitment to the creation of '*adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity*'. To that end the European Commission should consider investing in a **continuation of a cross-sectoral minimum income network** such as EMIN, while ensuring support for the functioning of a **network of National Public Authorities responsible for Minimum Income Schemes**. Given the central importance of reference budgets to building societal consensus on what is adequate to have a life in dignity and the importance of cross-national comparability, the Commission should ensure support for the **European Network of researchers on Reference Budgets**. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a **European Observatory on Minimum Income** that is adequately resourced to ensure the participation of all relevant actors. This observatory would ensure the knowledge developed through the various actions on minimum income is captured and available to inform future work. The observatory would also support, monitor and regularly report on developments in relation to Minimum Income Schemes.

Annex: Draft Terms of Reference EU Platform of National Public Authorities on Minimum Income

Background

The right to an adequate minimum income for everyone lacking sufficient resources, ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life is one of the twenty key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), proclaimed by Heads of States and Governments at a special Social Summit in Gothenburg on 17 November 2017. With this most recent development, the European Union aims at reinforcing its social dimension and promoting an upward convergence of the social performance between Member States.

To date, the EU has undertaken various initiatives to support Member States in developing effective minimum income systems. Such initiatives include the 1992 Council Recommendation on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems, the 2008 Commission Recommendation on the Active Inclusion of People Excluded from the Labour Market and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) to promote cooperation and learning among Member States through peer reviews. In 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights was adopted, which also includes principle 14 stating “Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market.”

Support by the European Commission to the setting up of a European Minimum Income Network (EMIN), as a pilot project on developing a common methodology on reference budgets in Europe and the assessment of the different minimum income schemes by the European Social Policy Network is also a clear indication of the desire to move forward on the Minimum income agenda.

The establishment of an EU Platform of Public authorities on Minimum Income offers the opportunity to supplement an additional building block to this policy framework through the development of a sustainable and lasting platform for structural, embedded collaboration between national public authorities responsible for the implementation and management of minimum income schemes in the different Member States of the European Union.

Scope of the Terms of Reference

The present Terms of Reference (ToR) are set to describe the objectives and the methodology for the establishment of an EU Platform of Public Authorities on Minimum Income. The decision to define ToR for the creation of such a Platform was made on 8 December 2017 in Brussels by the preparatory meeting involving representatives from Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Malta and the EMIN network, with participation by representatives from the European Commission.

The present ToR have been drafted by representatives from EMIN and the Belgian Public Planning Service for Social Integration and have been consulted with representatives from the meeting on 8 December 2017 and 16 April 2018. Following the meeting, an appointed group of 4-5 MS representatives shall be established to develop the ToR based on the input received during the meeting, which will work further to define the objectives, activities and organisational set up of the Platform. The ToR will be a living document that will be reviewed, discussed and modified as this cooperation develops over the coming years.

Vision and Overall aim of the initiative

The overall initiative is to establish an EU Platform of Public Authorities with responsibility for Minimum Income (acronym - to be discussed).

The **Vision of the Platform** is of a Europe where Public authorities mutually learn from each other, with the aim to achieve the realisation and implementation of the right to adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income schemes across Europe.

The **Mission of the Platform** is to provide a space for enhanced cooperation among public authorities in relation to the delivery of adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income schemes and encourages cooperation with other actors working to promote such schemes.

Immediate Objectives include:

- Get a clearer overview of **roles and responsibilities** relating to MI in different MS
- Strengthen the **exchange of experience and learning** between Public authorities by identifying evidence-based **good practices** and fostering **mutual learning**
- Strengthen the cooperation between Public authorities and civil society organisations at national level and at European level, such as EMIN
- Become a consultative body on Minimum Income that can provide input to relevant EU policies.

Long term development of the Platform

- In the long term, the Platform could develop the scope of its activities and continue its contribution to strengthening MI schemes implementation and delivery in line with the social objectives of the EU and particularly the EPSR by carrying out the following initiatives:
- The development and implementation of an EU-wide, evidence-based benchlearning³¹ among Public Authorities responsible for MI, to compare the performance of their activities on specific areas and measures and stimulate innovative and effective approaches
- The provision of mutual assistance and feedback, either in the form of peer-to-peer or group activities, through cooperation, exchanges of information, sharing experiences and exchange of staff between the members of the Platform in order to be empowered and develop new approaches and solutions. .
- Organize regular meetings of the Platform (minimum twice a year) with a focus on specific themes in relation to MI policies, to strengthen the influence of the group on policy developments that support the realisation and implementation of adequate, accessible and affordable MIS.
- Influence the EU-level agenda on MI and services by having a consultative role vis-à-vis the European institutions, drafting reports and opinions at the request of the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the Social Protection Committee or on its own initiative;

³¹ For the purposes of the ToR, the concept of 'benchlearning' refers to the process of creating a systematic and integrated link between benchmarking and mutual learning activities, that consists of identifying good performances through indicator-based benchmarking systems, including data collection, data validation, data consolidation and assessments, with appropriate methodology, and of using findings for tangible and evidence-informed mutual learning activities, including good or best practice models. Benchmarking exercise is under competence of Indicators Subgroup under Social Protection Committee.

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- Adopting and implementing its annual work programme setting out its working methods, deliverables and the details related to the implementation of benchlearning;
- Promoting results and experiences including by establishing a publicly accessible Internet platform for dissemination of information on activities and benchlearning. The online platform would contain a member section as a repository and space for working-level information sharing.
- The Platform shall engage in the implementation of these activities by supporting the sharing of knowledge and practices. It is within the Member State competence to decide whether to engage on a voluntary basis in these or in additional benchlearning exercises in areas other than those listed above.

Membership of the Platform

The Platform shall be composed of Members, representing Public Authorities from the EU Member States and EEA countries, participating on a voluntary basis. The Platform will also involve observers from the European Commission, the Social Protection Committee (SPC), EMIN and the Network of Public Employment Services (PES).

Member States with subnational autonomous Public Authorities having responsibilities for Minimum Income shall themselves decide on their representation in the specific initiatives of the Platform.

Members should take part at least once a year in a conference or meeting hosted by the Platform.

Members are encouraged to promote the Platform within their own country and network to support its activities.

Functioning of the Platform

In the short term:

- The Platform shall function on a voluntary basis.
- A steering group (4 to 5 people) shall be set up to guide the development of the Platform over the first two years.
- The responsibilities of the steering group are in the short term:
 - To develop the Platform, especially the work programme, further activities and resources
 - To represent and promote the Platform and its activities
- The European Minimum Income Network (EMIN) will continue to provide logistical, administrative and development support for the Platform.

In the long term:

- The Platform shall be governed by a Board. Member States shall nominate onto the Board one member and one alternate member.
- The European Commission and the Social Protection Committee shall appoint, from their members and in accordance with their Rules of Procedure, one representative each who will have observer status on the Board.
- The Board shall appoint a Chair to represent the Platform and two Vice-Chairs from among its members nominated by a Member State. Vice-Chairs shall replace the Chair whenever necessary.
- The Board shall adopt its Rules of Procedure by unanimous decision. Those Rules of Procedure shall contain, inter alia, the decision-making arrangements of the Board, and the provisions on the appointment and terms of office of the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Board.

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- The Board shall adopt by majority decision:
 - > the annual work programme of the Platform;
 - > the technical framework and methodologies for the activities
 - > the annual report of the Platform
- The Board shall be assisted by a Secretariat who, in cooperation with the Chair and Vice-Chairs, shall prepare the Board meetings, the annual work programme and the annual report of the Platform.

Cooperation

The Platform shall cooperate with relevant MI stakeholders including the EMIN network of civil society organisations, social partners, regional and local authorities where appropriate, the Social Protection Committee of the EU, and other relevant EU-agencies or European organisations or networks by involving them in relevant activities and meetings of the Platform and by exchanging information with them.

The Platform shall seek to obtain observer status with other relevant networks working in the area of minimum income such as the Network of Public Employment Services (PES) and the European Minimum Income Network (EMIN).

Financial support for the Platform

Support for the Platform will be sought through European funding (EaSI for example) and other sources of funding/co-financing at national level.

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Definitions used in the EMIN Project

Minimum Income Schemes are defined as, income support schemes which provide a safety net for people, whether in or out of work, and who have insufficient means of financial support, and who are not eligible for insurance based social benefits or whose entitlements to these have expired. They are last resort schemes, which are intended to ensure a minimum standard of living for the concerned individuals and their dependents.

EMIN aims at the progressive realisation of the right to adequate, accessible and enabling Minimum Income Schemes.

Adequacy is defined as a level of income that is indispensable to live a life in dignity and to fully participate in society. Adequate Minimum Income Schemes are regularly updated to take account of the evolution of the cost of living.

Accessible is defined as providing comprehensive coverage for all people who need the schemes for as long as they need the support. Accessible Minimum Income Schemes have clearly defined criteria, they are universal, non-contributory and means-tested. They do not discriminate against any particular group and have straightforward application procedures. They avoid:

- institutional barriers such as bureaucratic and complex regulations and procedures and have the minimum required conditionality,
- implementation barriers by reaching out to and supporting potential beneficiaries' personal barriers such as lack of information, shame or loss of privacy.

Enabling is defined as schemes that promote people's empowerment and participation in society and facilitates their access to quality services and inclusive labour markets.