Introduction/Contextualisation

- As you all know, we are finding ourselves in unprecedented times.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has quickly changed and will continue to change the political, social and economic landscape for the years to come.
- This new crisis brings new challenges to all EU countries, together with old challenges that are being exacerbated by the pandemic. We are seeing a magnification of issues that already existed - underinvestment in public services including health and social care services, inadequacy of social protection, undervaluing of key workers such as those in social care and the drastic inequalities that exist in our societies – both in terms of economic and social inequalities and access to basic rights. This pandemic has shown a stronger light on what was already there in such a way that it cannot be ignored any longer.
- Fundamental changes to our socio-economic system are necessary, with special attention to people in the most vulnerable situations. Indeed, certain groups at heightened risk of poverty, social exclusion and discrimination are also disproportionately affected by the impact of this crisis, such as children, youths, older people, women, people with disabilities, the LGBTIQ community, homeless people, migrants and refugees, and ethnic and religious minorities.
- We know that political and economic stability of any society depends on the extent to which people on the margins of society can fully participate in political and economic life.
- Now more than ever, public policies need to ensure that power and wealth are more equally distributed throughout society. They need to tackle inequalities, include all members of society and respect human rights.
- Contributing to shaping such a system is at the heart of our mission as Social Platform and across its membership.
- Now more than ever, we urge EU and national leaders to make it their mission too!
- As a starting point, we must avoid repeating the same mistakes made in the 2008 crisis, promoting austerity measures in a moment of crisis which is the time to invest in what keeps our societies together, including accessible, affordable quality services, quality employment for all, adequate social protection and decent income allowing all people in Europe to live in dignity.
- Looking forward, the EU must now embrace social protection as a strong foundation of their policies.
- Such an approach would avoid the prolonged negative social impact of the last crisis and could become the basis for long-term changes that build more inclusive and resilient societies that can better face crises in the future.

Importance of the European Semester process in this context

- The European Semester process is an important instrument in the current context: it is one of the key tools the EU has at its disposal to analyse the socio-economic situation at national level and to make recommendations for reforms to address existing and new challenges.
- Considering the impact of this crisis and the urgency of action, it is essential that these recommendations are the right ones, focusing on the priorities we just highlighted.
- However, we believe that certain reforms of the Semester process are necessary to ensure that it reaches its full potential in this regard.

Some key areas of Semester reform

1. Role of civil society organisations in the Semester process

- Therefore, we are having this event today – as CSO’s we know what is happening and what is needed to change and improve the lives of people living in Europe. We can provide the full picture, and this is essential to see if we want a semester that really contributes to an economy of wellbeing.
- We see a need for improved cooperation and dialogue of EU institutions and Member State’s governments with parliaments, social partners, and civil society organisations.
- CSOs bring together local, regional, and national members working with and representing the interests of people and organisations, including those who are most vulnerable and are traditionally underrepresented in decision-making. These groups are now among the most strongly affected by the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore especially crucial now that they are involved in all stages of the Semester process to make sure that the reforms recommended and implemented correspond to the situation on the ground.
- While opportunities for civil dialogue on the European Semester have been somewhat increasing at EU level, opportunities for CSOs at national level to influence the Semester process are often still quite limited and CSOs face various barriers in their efforts to influence policy-making.
- We would like to see more and strengthened recommendations within the Semester process for and increased efforts of Member States to involve CSOs in the development of the national reform programmes and stability/convergence programmes as well as in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of reform efforts.

2. Use of various frameworks (UN SDGs, EPSR) within the Semester process

- Considering that the European Semester does now support the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the coordination of economic, social and environmental policies, the interlinkages and mutual impacts of these policies on each other must be fully taken into consideration and the impact on people and planet must always evaluated and taken into account before the adoption of such policies. Above all, we need to see a strong message on social and environmental rights, linked to and aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- In our view, the EPSR is not sufficiently mainstreamed throughout the European Semester process and all its documents. While it is generally referenced in Semester documents, it is not used as a compass for the social and employment reforms recommended throughout the
process. We believe that this would be crucial to ensure that the reforms recommended in the framework of the Semester process fully contribute to the implementation of the EPSR.

- While the inclusion of the SDGs in the Semester process is positive, we see issues regarding the relationship between the SDGs and the EPSR within the Semester. While some principles of the EPSR and some SDGs overlap, there are also differences between them. It must be ensured that both the EPSR and the SDGs are properly mainstreamed within the Semester process and that no contradictions are created.

3. Existing thematic imbalances and contradictions within the Semester process

- We have been highlighting existing imbalances and contradictions between macroeconomic and social recommendations within the Semester process.
- The Semester process was created as a tool to coordinate macroeconomic policies and social policies have been increasingly included in the last years. However, we still do not see people’s wellbeing being at the core of the process. Inclusiveness and fairness still follow macroeconomic and employment priorities in importance.
- It needs to be ensured that the addition of environmental ones through the integration of the SDGs does not exacerbate this existing imbalance but that a good balance between all three priorities is struck and that contradictions are avoided from now on.

4. Lacking inclusion of disadvantaged groups

- Overall, the situation of disadvantaged groups is generally insufficiently addressed in the Semester process, especially in the country-specific recommendations (CSRs). Often, they are at best mentioned in the recitals of CSR documents, but they rarely receive specific mentions in the main recommendations. Therefore, they risk being overlooked in the implementation of CSRs at national level.
- Unfortunately, this was even more pronounced during the 2020 Semester cycle. All Member States received a recommendation to take all necessary measures to effectively address the pandemic, sustain the economy and support the ensuing recovery. While this recommendation at times contained further details on how to do so and while at times a second more socially focused CSR was added, the recommendations remained quite broad and did not take the specific situation of the most disadvantaged groups, who are most affected by the crisis, and the systemic inequalities they face into account.

5. Implementation of CSRs and structure of Semester regarding CSRs

- We believe that it is crucial to increase the implementation rates of CSRs.
- Also, progress remains uneven across policy areas and needs to increase especially in areas where it is lacking.
- As this year’s Spring Package includes a reduced number of CSRs that are quite overarching in their recommendation to tackle the impact of the crisis, Member States have much scope to define their own responses to the pandemic. While doing so, it is crucial that they ensure that social considerations are not ignored by a rigid approach of ‘if it is not a CSR it does not get priority’. This also concerns a number of important topics addressed in the preambles of the CSR documents which add significant detail to the existing challenges in the various Member States and measures suggested to address them, going well beyond the limited number of main recommendations addressed to the Member States.
- This also reflects one of the challenges with the structure of the Semester: there are limited recommendations, but at the same time the recommendations are increasingly going to be
linked to funding through the Structural Funds and as well as the reform programme and the Next Generation EU recovery plan.

6. The Semester as a tool to achieving the objectives of a post-2020 strategy

What is the goal of the Semester after 2020?
- This is also the time to ensure that the Semester process is an integral tool to achieving the objectives of a coherent comprehensive and ambitious social and sustainable long-term strategy post-2020 that we are currently missing.
- Such a strategy should aim fostering foster inclusive and sustainable development and integrate all the different proposed initiatives and priorities: the United Nations SDGs, a European Green Deal that is truly inclusive, the European Pillar of Social Rights and its action plan as well as all other initiatives foreseen by the European Commission in its political guidelines.
- This strategy also needs measurable objectives and targets using a variety of indicators disaggregated by key characteristics that build on the Europe 2020 strategy and that are taken seriously.

Conclusions
- There is a long way to go until the dust settles on this crisis and a comprehensive analysis of the social and economic repercussions of the pandemic can take place. For now, we need to monitor the impact of COVID-19 and government policies and reforms on poor and excluded groups, and on the structural causes of these inequalities.
- At the same time, we need to look at reforming the European Semester process, including through addressing the issues we just highlighted, to ensure that it lives up to its potential to steer reforms in Member States that successfully ensure Europe’s recovery.
- While the current situation is tragic, we must use this momentum to build a more inclusive and sustainable EU with the health and wellbeing of people at its heart. Only a community response, involving all stakeholders, including civil society organisations, with a clear focus on protecting the most vulnerable and recognising the need to strengthen social protection systems can ensure our collective recovery.
- Together, let’s build a Europe for all. With all.

2) Hyperlinks to Social Platform’s activities and publications:

**European Semester 2019-2020**

- [Social Platform news article about its presentation at the joint Social Protection Committee and Employment Committee meeting about the 2020 Spring package with key messages](#) (May 2020)
- [Social Platform news article about its presentation at the joint Social Protection Committee and Employment Committee meeting about the 2020 Autumn Package with key messages](#) (January 2020)
- [Social Platform analysis of the 2019 Semester cycle](#) (November 2019)

**COVID-19**

- [Social Platform website collecting responses & reactions of our member organisations](#) (ongoing)
- [Social Platform open letter to the European institutions calling to reinforce the social dimension of Next Generation EU and the revised 2021-2027 EU Budget](#) (June 2020)
- Social Platform news article about its presentation at the joint Social Protection Committee and Employment Committee meeting about the social and employment-related impact of COVID-19 with key messages (May 2020)
- Social Platform statement on COVID-19 (March 2020)

For more details, contact Katja Reuter, Policy & Advocacy Officer at Social Platform

AGE Platform Europe

1) Speaking points

- The non-replacement of the Europe 2020 Strategy is a cause for concern; while there is a consultation underway to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, it should lead to the setting of EU and member-state indicators and targets to make progress on social rights and the SDGs
- We welcome the general escape clause, expansionary stance and focus on health and social protection coverage in the CSRs
- Focus on health is needed and welcome, but many of the deficiencies exposed during the COVID-19 crisis were concentrated in all forms of long-term care: however, long-term care is addressed only for two member States. Needed would be
  o Ensure that long-term care is included within the key priorities in the implementation of the immediate and longer-term financing instruments proposed by the Commission, including the future European Social Fund+ and the new ambitious EU4Health Programme. These instruments should include support for professional long-term care services and informal carers alike.
  o Enable the implementation of principle 18 on long-term care, in particular regarding the access to community-care services, by ensuring that the European Semester builds on the Pillar and is strongly linked with the resources available in the proposed Recovery and Resilience Facility.
  o Recommendations to enable access to long-term care should encompass improved access to quality services – including palliative care –, integration of health and social care services, recognition of care work and improved working conditions in services as well as support for informal carers, including clear protocols and training on dealing with a pandemic.
  o Develop and integrate in the European Semester EU-wide quality and access indicators and targets for long-term care, building on existing reporting systems and avoiding additional administrative burden, to allow for benchmarking. The European Quality Framework for the wellbeing and dignity of older persons in need of LTC could be used as a tool to develop quality indicators.
  o Recommend the enforcement, as soon as possible, of surveillance systems as recommended by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).
- Still, some things regarding the new focus on health can be added. Investment in health promotion and disease prevention is critical to improve the general health status of EU citizens, but also to fight against inequalities. From the first results of some research conducted around the patients of COVID-19, there are clearly inequalities: meaning that not all older persons aged 65+ have been hit in the same way. Those with chronic disease, those living in poorer areas and/or having a lower socio-economic background have paid a heavier price.
- The focus on expanding social protection and protecting employment is important; some pre-existing issues in social protection however have not been addressed, such as the inadequacy
of benefits and administrative barriers leading to non-take-up of benefits. In the implementation of the recommendations care should be taken:

- To promote policies that avoid the mass dismissals among older workers who might not be able to find a new job before retirement age
- To invest into training and life-long learning for people of all age groups, supporting especially the young hardest-hit by the crisis, but also using momentum to update and upgrade skills of older persons
- To pay attention to the erosion of purchasing power of pensions due to long-term under-indexation or increase in certain prices that have a strong impact on pensioners (e.g. housing costs)
- To make access to social protection benefits simpler, especially to reduce bureaucracy and the need to understand complex frameworks of social benefits
- A European Framework on minimum incomes, based on meaningful reference budgets, remains a priority

- **Investments in digitalisation** should not lead to inaccessibility of public and private services offline and should not intensify desertification of rural territories. Investments should also be channelled into providing access to connectivity, such as via public internet spots or programmes for leasing equipment to persons who may not afford it. A Good practice to be highlighted is the provision of some care homes with connectivity and equipment to residents during lockdowns and isolation measures.

- **Green investments** should focus on investments with a social impact, especially on public transport and accessible mobility, adaptable and low-energy social housing and renovations of dwellings of low-income households

2) Hyperlinks to AGE Platform Europe’s publications:

**European Semester 2019-2020**

- [AGE assessment of 2019 European Semester](#)

**COVID-19**

- [AGE working paper on the recovery from COVID-19 crisis: Do not repeat the errors of the 2008 Great Depression](#)
- [AGE open letter to EU Commission on long-term care](#)
- [COVID-19 and human rights of older persons](#)
- [AGE Barometer 2019](#)

**European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)**

1) Speaking points

- 1. Important backing for emergency measures responding to COVID and CSR 1 ‘escape clause’ but threat of austerity cuts to recoup deficits. Welcome challenges to aggressive tax planning but progressive tax justice to finance welfare states and reduce inequality is notably lacking.
- 2. Exit Strategies support green + digital transition but insufficient focus on ‘inclusive transition’, investing in social rights, welfare states and public services.
- 3. 14 MS received poverty CSRs highlighting impact of COVID on existing poverty with some useful measures (although no table included) but lacking a rights-based integrated antipoverty strategy based on active inclusion
- 4. Too many left behind! No CSRs for at-risk target groups, nor any concrete measures: particularly with respect to the homeless, Roma and ethnic minorities, migrants, families with children and people with disabilities although mentions in the preambles and Country Reports.
- 5. Welcome focus on adequacy/coverage of minimum income (11) and income replacement (6) with important call for progress towards social protection for all as a social right, regardless of employment status, but implementation needed and continued softening of conditionality
- 6. Insufficient guarantees with regard to universal access to essential services and to considering the social impact and cost of privatisation of public services.
- 7. Health and long-term care a new priority! - but needs a stronger focus on universal access, unmet needs, a rights-based approach, public service principles and public investment.
- 8. Employability and skills development still priorities for overcoming new challenges due to the COVID19 pandemic, but no mention of promoting inclusive labour markets or active inclusion.
- 9. Quality of work insufficiently prioritised and in-work poverty largely ignored, but more weight given to the role of Public Employment Services and social partners.
- 10. Education and training still primarily seen as labour market tools, despite some attention given to inclusiveness, quality, and vulnerable groups.
- 11. Inclusive and quality education is largely off the radar, and the strong link between disadvantaged socioeconomic background and poor educational outcomes is not included in the CSRs.
- 12. Continued improvements to social dialogue but much more needed on civil dialogue and the meaningful involvement of civil society organisations, particularly in the NRPs.

2) Hyperlinks to EAPN’s publications:

**European Semester 2019-2020**


**COVID-19:**


**European Pillar of Social Rights**
Eurocarers

1) Speaking points

- On behalf of Eurocarers I would like to very warmly thank our co-host for the opportunity to voice the perspective of our organisation and of informal carers today. Eurocarers is the European network representing informal carers and their organisations, currently bringing together 71 carers’ and research organisations from 26 countries.
- We define informal carer as a person who provides – usually – unpaid care to someone with a chronic illness, disability or any other long-lasting health or care needs, outside a professional or formal framework.
- We seek to ensure that the existing and growing care needs are addressed in a universal and equitable way, and that the essential contribution of informal carers is valued, recognised and supported in order to prevent the negative impact of care on carers themselves. We believe that people should have the right to choose freely whether they want to be a carer, and to what extent they want to be involved in caring. People needing care should have the right to choose who they wish to be their carers.
- The pandemic has dramatically exacerbated the difficulties that informal carers were facing before the crisis. Millions of carers found themselves managing care without support in a context of acute isolation, and constant worry for the health of their relatives and their own. Still, very little attention was paid to them.
- Eurocarers sees the Semester as a potentially powerful tool to stimulate the improvement of policies related to care and caring across Europe. Our analysis of this year’s cycle will be available later this week, and our main messages are as follows:
  o While issues related to informal care (and long-term care) have gradually gained more ground through the Semester process over the last few years, we are worried that they are dramatically less visible this year.
  o Having said that, the Semester package accurately points out a series of issues of concern to informal carers. However, it only sheds light on the tip of the iceberg. Besides, CSRs seem to focus on the short-term exit from the crisis and, in doing so, they may lose sight of the long-awaited and profound reforms in areas with a heavy bearing on the daily life of carers, namely health, LTC and gender equality.

Health

- We welcome the priority given to health, even though the focus seems to be mainly on addressing urgent needs, when reforms on the longer term are needed to progress toward integrated health care services centred around people’s needs. Such reforms should recognise informal carers both as 1/ as a group at risk, with a need for health prevention, 2/ as partners in care, should they wish to remain involved in caring
- We also welcome the focus on digital health: we hope that it will help scale up existing innovation of relevance to carers. ALTHOUGH ICT-based care should only be approached as ONE tool among others, complementing face-to-face services. Yet, the feedback from some of our members is that ICT has sometimes replaced services, which is acceptable only during – but not after – the crisis.

Long-term care
While the crisis has exacerbated pre-existing weaknesses, too little priority is given to LTC in the Country recommendations. We nevertheless need an ambitious approach to improve the accessibility, affordability and quality of LTC services (and the working conditions) in the EU including home care and community-based care, building on a coordinated approach and agreed common indicators.

**Gender equality**

- While the unequal sharing of care responsibilities is a key factor underpinning gender inequalities on the labour market, the lack of LTC facilities is too rarely assessed in relation to the situation of women.
- Also, the Semester fails to assess measures taken in favour of WLB. We see this as a risk whereby the initial ambition of the Directive concerning informal carers would be narrowed down, with a focus mainly on parents and on ‘flexible ‘employment, to cushion the impact of the crisis’.

- To conclude, we regret that an opportunity to recognise the real value of care has been missed. We are at a crossroads, and it essential that European countries engage in much-needed reforms ensuring equal access for all to integrated care services of quality, building on a dialogue with stakeholders, including informal carers.
- To prevent informal carers to remain in the blind angle in policy making, we invite MEP’s to join the informal Interest Group on informal carers.
- Thank you for your attention.

2) Hyperlinks to Eurocarers’ publications:

**European Semester**

- [Eurocarers’ analysis of the European Semester: Informal carers, left aside again?](https://example.com) (July 2020)
- [European Semester 2019: how to build on the increasing focus on care?](https://example.com) (October 2019)

**COVID-19**

- [Can Europe afford to leave informal carers on their own at the forefront of the coronavirus battle?](https://example.com) (March 2020)

**Eurodiaconia**

1) Speaking points

- Semester is still too focused on economic growth above all else. There needs to be a true Economy of Wellbeing approach – “Economic growth accompanied by worsening social outcomes is not success, it is failure.” The mantra of 2008/9 cannot be adopted now – we have seen the costs it inflicted in so many different ways.
- When times are hard you must invest. COVID has underlined the existing inequalities in our societies – underinvestment in public services, holes in social protection, undervaluing key workers such as care workers, drastic inequalities, poverty. Pleased to see the activation of the Escape Clause of the SGP and that the EC are pushing investment in the 2020 CSRs but this focus must continue into the next Semester and thereafter - social investment needs to be maintained. It is, after all, an investment, not a cost.
- Implementation rates of the CSRs remain painfully low and falling. There needs to be a greater use of both carrots and sticks to encourage better implementation of reforms – link to recovery programme, cohesion policy etc.

- The 2020 CSRs understandably pay more attention to the health care situation than ever before. However, COVID did not only heavily impact our health care sector. All care services have been massively impacted. The lack of direct support by the European Commission to the social services sector has had a major impact on our sector being able to respond to the crisis. The needs of social service providers as well as health care providers must be taken into account in the European Semester if we are to truly combat the devastating effect of COVID. LTC should be afforded the same attention as health care. That includes the extraordinary staff who work in this sector. There also needs to be much better cooperation between social services, healthcare and LTC – now and into the future.

2) Hyperlinks to Eurodiaconia’s publications:

- Eurodiaconia analysis of the Spring Package (July 2020)
- Eurodiaconia analysis of the Winter Package (April 2020)
- Eurodiaconia assessment of the 2019 Semester and priorities for 2020 (October 2019)

ENSIE

1) Speaking points

1. Presented CSRs are all relevant however, there could have been additional emphasis on social rights issues. This will be particularly important considering the rising level of unemployment that we will see over the coming months. The social economy, in particular WISEs, will play an extremely important role in the coming years through the provision of skills, trainings and employment of those who are far from the labour market. In fact, these enterprises provide support to the most disadvantaged communities and contribute to a better recovery from the crisis. ENSIE denounces the lack of visibility of the social economy actors in the whole Semester process. These actors are crucial for the economic recovery from the crisis as we as for the social and professional inclusion of people.

2. To make sure no one is left behind in the framework of this process it is essential to secure the accessibility of WISEs, Not-for-Profits and other social economy enterprises to the support measures put in place by the European Commission (especially measures regarding flexibility and finance).

3. The ASGS presented the green and digital transitions as tools creating more new jobs. In this context, it is necessary to ensure the skills transition too especially for low-skilled people who risk being excluded even more. In addition, workplaces and managerial practices should be adapted to the disadvantaged people’s needs.

4. The European Commission should monitor that all disadvantaged people have access to the existing programs put in place.

5. Finally, ENSIE supports the 2012 Council Recommendation and the initiative of Member States offering citizens more and more possibilities to validate the skills acquired outside the institutional education and training systems.

2) Further written messages to be circulated

- ENSIE welcomes the civil dialogue promoted by the European Commission but advocates for better monitoring and communication between national and European stakeholders.
Consultation events/opportunities at national levels often never reach relevant civil society organisations.

- ENSIE welcomes the increased monitoring of the Member States’ achievements in terms of the implementation of the SDGs through the Semester process as WISEs contribute to 10 out of 17 SDGs and advocates for the same reinforcement of the monitoring of the implementation of the EPSR principles with the EPSR Action Plan.

3) Hyperlinks to organisation’s publications:

- ENSIE Analysis of the European Commission’s Communication on the 2020 Country Specific Recommendations (June 2020)
- ENSIE’s position on the Proposal for the Joint Employment Report (February 2020)
- ENSIE’s position on the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (December 2019)

European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network

1) Written messages to be circulated

1. ERGO Network warmly welcomes that the Roma are explicitly mentioned in the 2020 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy and the Communications accompanying the Country Reports and the Country-Specific Recommendations. However, the references in the Country Reports themselves, and the CSR Preambles, are scarce, and for the first time since 2012 there is no CSR dedicated to Roma inclusion. While the understand 2019 Recommendations remain valid, and a strategic choice was made to focus on the recovery of all, it is our experience that a) Roma communities were disproportionately hit by the pandemic, and b) if they are not explicitly referenced, mainstream measures don’t reach them. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that one of Europe’s most marginalised communities is not left behind in the difficult recovery process. Any emergency or recovery plan must address the specific situation of Roma through measures that directly target Roma as marginalized groups, while ensuring that all general measures reach Roma communities. The interventions should be coordinated with the full involvement of national Roma representatives, such as National Roma Contact Points, Roma mediators, and Roma civil society organisations. The European Union should request Member States, Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries to urgently provide humanitarian relief to counter the disproportionate health, social, and economic impact of the pandemic on Roma communities and other vulnerable groups.

2. There is a lack of alignment between the EU Strategic Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the European Semester and its processes. The post-2020 “EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Social and Economic Justice and Combating Antigypsyism” must constitute a top priority in the Covid-19 response of the EU, Member States and Enlargement countries, in order to comprehensively address the structural exclusion, inequality, discrimination, and vulnerability of Roma communities in the aftermath of the pandemic. The Framework needs to include minimum standards, common EU indicators, and joint monitoring and implementation through the European Semester. It would be implemented in synergy with mainstream initiatives such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Green Deal etc. Additionally, the design and delivery of these mainstream initiatives need to take full account of Roma rights and inclusion, and ensure, not least through the involvement of national and European Roma civil society, that these frameworks don’t leave the Roma behind and explicitly target their specific challenges, in full coherence with the EU Roma Strategic Framework.
3. In dealing with the Covid-19 crisis and subsequent recovery, Governments should ensure that Roma are safe from racism, violence, and discrimination, rigorously investigating incidents of antigypsyism and police abuse, as well as monitoring and sanctioning the dissemination of misinformation, hate speech and the scapegoating of Roma by the media, politicians or public figures, including the ethnicising of crimes allegedly committed by Roma in the public discourse. For the moment, ethnic minorities, racism and discrimination are completely absent from the Country-Specific Recommendations and very rarely mentioned in the Country Reports. ERGO Network calls for a post-2020 EU Roma Strategy and that puts combating antigypsyism at its centre, and ensures cross-cutting priorities within, such as intersectional discrimination, poverty, material deprivation, gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, environmental racism etc.

4. A special provision for Roma should be included when implementing European funding instruments for temporary support (SURE, FEAD etc), and the Emergency Fund for Vulnerable Group Rights and Value Programme should be used to support Roma and pro-Roma civil society and mediators to distribute supplies to people to need. These targeted emergency interventions are badly needed since, according to the Fundamental Rights Agency, OSCE, Council of Europe and civil society reports, Roma communities in several EU countries are especially vulnerable during the Covid-19 pandemic. Social isolation measures disproportionately prevented them from working while not ensuring replacement income, which led to food deprivation, debt and tension within communities; many Roma children struggled to access distance education, widening the education gap between Roma and non-Roma; Roma experienced discrimination and harassment, being blamed for the spread of the virus. For the medium and longer term, a new impetus needs to be given to EU Funds (including Enlargement and Neighbourhood Funds) for the next programming period to ensure that initiatives reach Roma communities, through including an explicit Roma investment priority and enabling condition, as well as a dedicated Roma indicator, and through ensuring coherence between Programmes and National Roma Integration Strategies.

For more details, contact Amana Ferro, Senior Policy Adviser with the ERGO Network staff team.

2) Hyperlinks to ERGO Network’s publications:

- Analyses of the European Semester 2020:
  - [Response to the Country-Specific Recommendations 2020](#)
  - [Response to the Country Reports 2020](#)
  - [Response to the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020](#)

- ERGO Network positions on a sustainable recovery and post 2020 strategies:
  - [EU Recovery Plan: The case of Roma in the Member States, Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries](#)
  - [Covid-19 impact on Roma communities: Insights into the situation of different Member, Enlargement and Neighbourhood States](#)
  - [Appeal to the European Commission and the European Council to make the post-2020 EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality and Inclusion a top priority in its Covid-19 response](#)

SOLIDAR

1) Speaking points
As we all know, social policy for the most part remains the domain of Member States. Therefore, if the EU is serious about realising a socially sustainable recovery, the European Semester must undoubtedly play a key part.

SOLIDAR analyses the European Semester process in its annual Social Rights Monitor. This year’s edition of the Monitor will be presented in November, so I cannot spoil too many details just yet. Overall, we see that the 2020 Country Reports seem to be more aware of the social situation in each Member State and as a result we expect the discrepancies between the Country reports and the analysis from our members on the ground will be somewhat smaller.

However, when we look at the current indicators, those often still only scratch the surface of social realities. SOLIDAR has long advocated for looking below the surface of, for example, unemployment rates. And to also consider the quality of employment, adequacy of wages, the working conditions and the adequacy of social protection systems.

The current cycle partially delivers on this with increased attention for fair employment and decent wages to tackle in-work poverty, but a better analysis is still needed for ‘precarious forms of work’.

These inequalities in the labour market have become all the more prominent in the current crisis where it has become painfully clear that high employment rates alone are not sufficient to keep people out of poverty. We have all witnessed how precarious working conditions put people at risk to lose their jobs as soon as there is a systemic shock. This situation is worsened by a lack of adequate social protection floors in many countries.

Another argument which is demystified is that temporary employment is a stepping stone towards open-ended contracts. On the contrary in fact, we have seen that those countries with the highest rates of temporary contracts, such as Spain and Portugal, also have the lowest rates of transition from temporary to open-ended contracts.

We are currently working with the Foundation for European Progessive Studies (FEPS) on a study that explores how to better incorporate these inequalities in the European Semester process. This publication is expected in September, so you will undoubtedly hear more about this in fall.

Overall, we are missing an overarching post-2020 strategy. The Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy that we have this year does not aspire to a paradigm shift based on the Agenda 2030 and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

SOLIDAR advocates for a much clearer road map to indicate how this concept of ‘competitive sustainability’, that the European Commission has put at the core of the European Semester can contribute to ending poverty, reducing inequalities, improving living conditions and well-being, and ensuring decent work for all.

In all of this, there is still a lot to be achieved in terms of engagement of CSOs. Several SOLIDAR members have stressed to us that there is little to no outreach by their national government to include them in the consultation process. We believe that if we want to achieve meaningful social change through the European Semester, we must start by encouraging ownership of the process at all levels.

2) Hyperlinks to SOLIDAR’s publications:

- Academic publication on Inequalities and the European Semester (to be published in September)
- SOLIDAR Social Rights Monitor 2020 (to be published in November)
- SOLIDAR Social Rights Monitor 2019