



EAPN Ireland Policy Group on Europe 2020

Policy Briefing and Update on Poverty Targets, the European Semester and Europe 2020

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Contents

Introduction

Why do the European Semester and the Anti-Poverty Targets matter?

PART 1: Irish and EU Poverty Reduction Targets

- Poverty Targets and current poverty levels
- Note: What do we mean by poverty?

PART 2: The European Semester

- Europe 2020 Strategy
- Stability and Growth Pact
- The National Social Report

Table A: The Annual European Semester Reporting Process

Table B: Europe 2020 and Irish targets and progress towards

Table C: Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland 2015

PART 3: Other Recent EU Developments

- A New Start for Europe
- EU Investment Plan
- EU 5 Presidents' Report
- Structural Funds

PART 4: Further Information



EAPN Ireland Policy Group on Europe 2020

EAPN Ireland convenes the Group, which aims to ensure the implementation of the social inclusion and equality commitments of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It is made up of representatives of the following organisations:

- Age Action Ireland
- Congress Centres Network
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- EAPN Ireland
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
- National Adult Literacy Agency
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- One Family
- Simon Communities of Ireland
- SIPTU

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Introduction

Why do the European Semester and the Anti-Poverty Targets matter?

EAPN Ireland was set up over 20 years ago to support groups working against poverty in influencing European and Irish policy through training, advocacy, information and networking in Ireland and across Europe.

The last few years have shown more than ever the impact of European policies on people's lives here in Ireland and the dangers of getting it wrong.

EAPN Ireland convenes the Policy Group on Europe 2020 precisely because the 10 year Europe 2020 strategy is the main way in which EU member states, including Ireland, coordinate policies on the economy, society and environment. It is also meant to be the guiding force for many other policies, such as the governance of the Structural Funds.

In recent years, the Stability and Growth Pact has become increasingly important with enforceable economic rules.

Together these processes are tracked through a timetable of activities known as the '*European Semester*'. Understanding this process is essential to discussing Government and European policies 'in the round' and trying to influence them.

These processes also allow us to learn from counterparts and other countries across Europe. Europe 2020 objectives are also linked to the priorities for EU funding for 2014-2020, including the Structural Funds.

Europe 2020 includes specific commitments on reducing poverty and social exclusion and making progress on education, employment and climate change. It includes the target of lifting at least 20 million people out of risk of poverty and exclusion by 2020. If implemented, these commitments should have positive outcomes for people across the EU and particularly those most marginalised.

However, since the economic crisis of 2008, most discussion has concentrated on how countries are managing their national budgets rather than on the social implications of this.

EAPN, in Ireland and across Europe, have given priority to working to influence the Europe 2020 Strategy and European Semester process. Our experience to date has been that what is supposed to be a balanced process has so far been undermined by the priority being given to economic policies dominated by austerity. This has resulted in increased poverty and social exclusion.

Even as the Irish economy recovers, there is a danger that this negative approach gets reinforced, with a limited approach to addressing social issues. This needs to be countered by pressure for a stronger commitment to the addressing the causes of poverty and inequality and to the creation of a more inclusive and sustainable society. EAPN has called for this to be done through an integrated strategy which addresses not only social policies but also economic policies which impact on poverty, exclusion and inequality.

This updated briefing explains the European Semester, the Irish poverty targets and a number of related processes.

We would welcome feedback which can be incorporated as the briefing is further updated.

PART 1

Irish and EU Poverty Reduction Targets

In 2010 the EU Leaders agreed the target of lifting at least 20 million people, out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020, from a starting number of over 116 million people¹.

This target was one of five agreed as part of the *Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, the agreed 10-year economic, social and environmental planning framework for the EU (see page 6). At the time EAPN argued that this target was not ambitious enough. However, five years later there are now an additional 5 million people in poverty and social exclusion in the EU, almost one in five of the total population, and we cannot see any serious commitment to reaching the poverty reduction target.

The Irish Government has also set a target to reduce poverty, in this case meaning ‘consistent poverty’ (see page 5) from 6.3% in 2010 to 4% by 2016 and 2% or less by 2020. In fact, the number has increased to 8.2% by 2013, or 377,000 people in consistent poverty², 90,000 more than when the target was set.

In 2014/2015 the EU began to carry out a mid-term review of the Strategy. This should be a major opportunity to put the Europe 2020 Strategy on track. However, this review seems to have stalled and there is little evidence of a serious commitment to poverty reduction.

This briefing explains the Europe 2020 process and discusses why it is important for organisations involved in fighting poverty and social exclusion to engage with it and remind the Government and the EU of their commitments. It complements a more detailed Toolkit developed by EAPN (Europe)³.

Poverty Targets and current poverty levels

	Target	Actual situation (2013)
EU – Europe 2020 Strategy poverty target	To lift at least 20 million people out of risk of poverty and exclusion by 2020. (from 116.6 million people in EU 27 in 2008)	121.6 million people at risk of poverty and exclusion, an increase of 5 million people (122.9 million in EU 28)
Irish - National Social Target for Poverty Reduction⁴	To reduce the number experiencing consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.3%. Also to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 the population in combined poverty (either consistent poverty, at-risk-of poverty or basic deprivation).	8.2% or 377,000 people in consistent poverty Increase of 310,000 people in combined poverty (510,000 now to be lifted out of combined poverty by 2020)

Official poverty statistics can be tracked on <http://www.cso.ie/en/silc/>

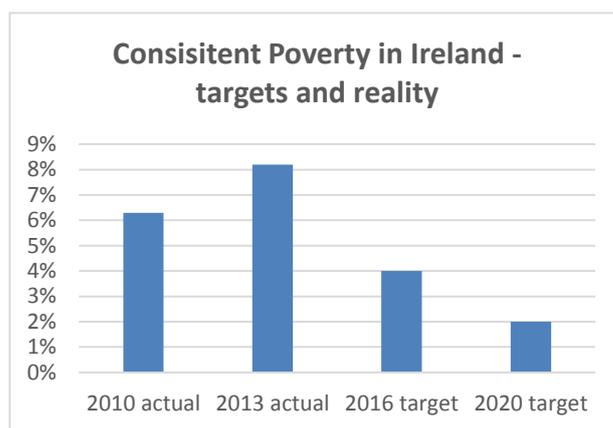
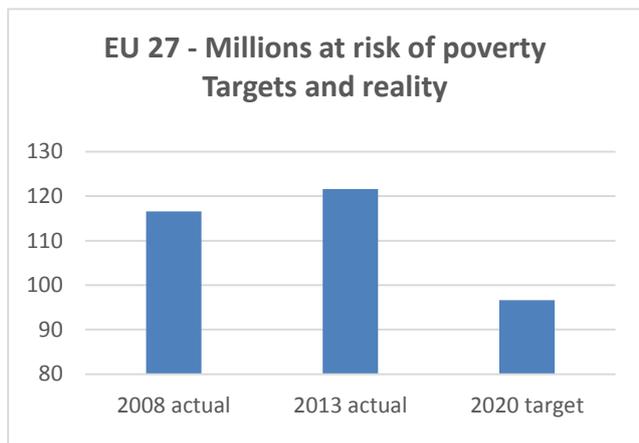
¹ For the purposes of the EU target those at risk of poverty or social exclusion are those who are at risk of poverty, severely materially deprived or living in households with very low work intensity (aged 0-59 and the working age members in the household worked less than 20 % of their potential during the past year).

² Those in consistent poverty are living below the 60% poverty line (€201.82 in 2013) and experiencing material deprivation as they cannot afford at least 2 of 11 agreed essential items.

³ <http://www.eapn.eu/images/stories/docs/EAPN-position-papers-and-reports/2015-eapn-toolkit-stakeholder-involvement.pdf>

⁴ Department of Social Protection 2012, National Social Target for Poverty Reduction http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/PublishedNPTBriefing_003.pdf

Poverty Target (continued)



Note

What do we mean by poverty? (from www.eapn.ie)

“People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities considered the norm for other people in society.”

(Official definition since the adoption of the 1997 National Anti-Poverty Strategy.)

There are three ways of measuring poverty levels in Ireland:

Relative/At Risk of Poverty

60% of the disposable income of the median (or middle) household. This is the most common measure of poverty used across the EU, where it is often referred to as the ‘at risk of poverty’ level. 15.2% of the population were at-risk of poverty in 2013.

Material Deprivation

Not being able to afford at least two of the eleven goods or services considered essential for a basic standard of living. 30.5% of the population experienced material deprivation in 2013. The current 11 indicators are:

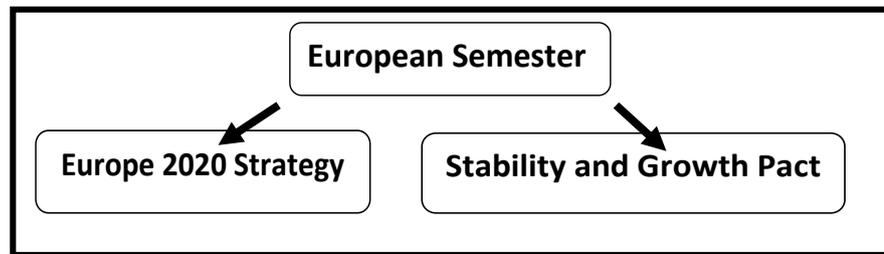
- Two pairs of strong shoes
- A warm waterproof overcoat
- Buy new not second-hand clothes
- Eat meals with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day
- Have a roast joint or its equivalent once a week
- Had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money
- Keep the home adequately warm
- Buy presents for family or friends at least once a year
- Replace any worn out furniture
- Have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month
- Have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight, for entertainment

Consistent poverty

The proportion of people who are both relatively poor (less than 60% of median income) and who are materially deprived because they cannot afford two of the eleven agreed items. 8.2% of the population were in consistent poverty in 2013.

PART 2

The European Semester



The **European Semester** is the term used for the coordinated annual monitoring by the European Institutions two separate processes:

- **The Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**⁵ which over the period 2010-2020 and contains economic, social and environmental commitments.
- **The Stability and Growth Pact**⁶ which came into force in 1998 and contains binding commitments on how EU Governments manage their deficits and debt. It was integrated into the European Semester process in 2010 and has taken on a stronger role in the last number of years due to the economic crisis.

The European Semester is implemented through a series of reports and recommendations at EU and national level (see Page 8).

The Europe 2020 targets **are not legally enforceable** and there are no penalties for not achieving them. They are implemented through a 'soft law' coordination process by the EU and Member States. The Stability and Growth Pact targets **are legally enforceable** with penalties for failing to respect the rules.

The Europe 2020 Strategy

In June 2010 the Europe 2020 Strategy replaced the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs (also known as Lisbon Agenda 2000-2010). The Europe 2020 Strategy is presented as the means of progressing an integrated approach to economic, environmental and social goals of the EU. The Europe 2020 Strategy contains five agreed targets and each EU Member State, including Ireland, adopted its own national targets to support that achievement of the EU targets (see table on page 10).

As part of the European 2020 process, all EU Member States must submit their **National Reform Programmes** to the European Commission in April each year, outlining progress towards the five targets.

There are strong and worrying indications that the Europe 2020 Strategy has effectively been sidelined by the new European Commission which began its term in late 2014. A publication of proposals on the mid-term review of Europe 2020, due in early 2015, has been postponed by the European Commission. This is very worrying particularly since the number of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion has increase by five million people since the start of the strategy. The process of reporting on progress towards the Europe 2020 targets still continues but overall there is less reference to the Europe 2020 Strategy and the commitments on poverty and social exclusion in the wider European Semester process of which it is part.

⁵ European Commission website: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/index_en.htm

⁶ European Commission website: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/economic_governance/sgp/index_en.htm

The Stability and Growth Pact

The Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) is the framework for the coordination of national fiscal policies in the EU. Fiscal policies are finances controlled by the Government. The Pact was established to safeguard sound public finances, based on the principle that economic policies are a matter of shared concern for all EU Member States. The Stability and Growth Pact contains two arms – the preventive arm and the corrective arm.

The preventive arm on an ongoing basis tries to ensure that fiscal policy is going in the right direction are not heading into difficulty and that any budget deficits are reduced or limited. It also imposes ceilings for government's expenditure based on the expected growth of the economy.

The *corrective arm* or **Excessive Deficit Procedure** kicks in to bring a country's finances back in line when they breach one or both of the following ceilings:

1. The general government deficit must not exceed 3% of GDP; and
2. Public debt must not exceed 60% of GDP or must move towards the 60% target (the gap between a country's debt level and the 60% ceiling must be reduced by 1/20th annually).

These targets are included in the European Union treaties and strengthened through an intergovernmental agreement called the Fiscal Treaty which Ireland voted in favour of in a referendum on the 31st May 2012. More detailed rules were agreed by EU Member States in what are known as the 'six-pack' in 2011 and the 'two-pack' in 2013⁷.

Included in the '**six-pack**' are the financial penalties countries could face for failing to take proper action while the '**two-pack**' reinforced the preventive arm by requiring Euro area Member States to submit their draft annual budgets to the European Commission for approval by the 15th October each year.

The European Commission is responsible for enforcing the Excessive Deficit Procedure under the corrective arm. If a country does not comply, this can result in sanctions for Eurozone countries, or possible suspension of Structural Funds for all EU Member States.

Ireland is currently under the corrective arm, but as the budget deficit is expected to fall below 3% at the end of 2015 it will most likely move to the preventive arm for 2016. This imposes restrictions on what the Government can do in Budget 2016.

Macro-economic Imbalance Procedure: This operates alongside the Stability and Growth Pact. It is an early warning system with a Scoreboard containing a range of indicators. It is published in the Alert Mechanism Report in November each year.

The National Social Report

The National Social Reports are not officially part of the European Semester or Europe 2020, but they are supposed to play a crucial link role between Europe 2020 and the Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC) which has been in place since 2000. They give greater detail in reporting on the social dimension of the NRPs in the Semester and are coordinated by the Social Protection Committee⁸ at EU level (representatives from the Social Ministries from the Member States). The reports are due in April alternating between a full report and a light report every second year. 2015 was a light report. Member States receive Guidance to fill the reports which contain sections on Social Inclusion, Pensions, Health and Long-term Care.

⁷ European Commission 2013. European Economic Governance Explained: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-318_en.htm

⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=758>

Table A: The Annual Semester Reporting Process

EUROPE 2020 (thematic surveillance)	STABILITY AND GROWTH PACT & MACROECONOMIC IMBALANCES PROCEDURE
<p style="text-align: center;">November</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Annual Growth Survey – European Commission</p> <p>Setting out broad EU economic priorities for the year and for Europe 2020. These are to be taken into account in each EU country when they are preparing their national reports. It is accompanied by a Staff Working Document which outlines how each country has been implementing the Country Specific Recommendations (see below) from the year before and by the draft Joint Employment Report which assesses the social and employment situation in the EU.</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">November</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Alert Mechanism Report by EU Commission</p> <p>When difficulties are highlighted through this report, it triggers a response from the Commission. The indicators are mainly economic, but in 2013 the Commission integrated social indicators, including long-term unemployment; poverty and social exclusion; young people not in employment, education or training and inequality.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">February</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Country Reports by the European Commission</p> <p>Issued to each country, presenting a range of policy areas and highlighting issues to be addressed.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">April</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Reform Programmes, member states</p> <p>Annual reports submitted by each EU country to the European Commission. NRPs outline progress towards the five Europe 2020 targets and how the Country Specific Recommendations and the EU level priorities in the Annual Growth Survey are being implemented. Countries in a Troika programme do not submit a full NRP but an update letter.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">April</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Stability or Convergence Programme</p> <p>Stability Programmes are prepared by EU countries in the Euro area and Convergence Programmes by EU countries not in the Euro area. They are submitted to the Commission at the same time as the NRPs. The aim of the reports is to enable the Commission to assess if the countries are keeping to the budget rules set by the EU as part of the Growth and Stability Pact.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">May/June</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Country Specific Recommendations to each country – European Commission and European Council</p> <p>These are based on an assessment of each country’s economic and social performance, including a detailed analysis of their NRPs and Stability or Convergence Programmes and how far they are delivering on the priorities laid out in the Annual Growth Survey. The Recommendations can be very specific and cover a broad range of issues. The draft Recommendation are debated before a final version is endorsed by the Heads of State of Governments (European Council) in July concluding the European Semester. The Recommendations should be taken into account in the policies of each country, in particular in their annual budgets, and their implementation needs to be detailed in the following year’s National Reform Programme</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">October</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Eurozone Budget Appraisal – EU Commission</p>

Table B: Europe 2020 and Irish targets and progress towards them

	Poverty, Social Exclusion	Employment	Education	Climate Change
EU Targets	Promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of risk of poverty and exclusion by 2020. (from 116.6 million people in EU 27 in 2008)	Raise to 75% the employment rate of women and men aged 20-64, including the greater participation of young people, older workers and low-skilled workers and better integration of legal migrants.	Improving education levels, in particular by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. aiming to reduce school drop-out rates to less than 10% and ii. increasing the share of 30-34 years old having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 (from 1990), ii. increasing the share of renewables in energy consumption by 20% (from 2005) and iii. Moving towards a 20% increase in energy efficiency (from 2005).
EU Progress (to 2013 unless stated)	121.6 million people in 2013, an increase of 5 million people (122.9 million incl. Croatia)	69.8% (EU 28 in 2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 11.1% 2014 from 4.6%, 2008 ii. 37.9% (in 2014) from 31.2% in 2008) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Down to 82.14% in 2012 15% ii. 12.8%
Irish Target	To reduce the number experiencing consistent poverty to 4% by 2016 (interim target) and to 2% or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.3%. Also to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 the population in combined poverty (either consistent poverty, at-risk-of poverty or basic deprivation).	To raise to 69-71% the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64, including through the greater participation of young people, older workers and low-skilled workers and the better integration of legal migrants, and to review the target level of ambition in 2014, in the context of the mid-term review of Europe 2020 Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To reduce the percentage of 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education and not in further education and training to 8%; ii. to increase the share of 30-34 year olds who have completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 60%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the non-traded sector by 20% compared to 2005 levels; iii. increase the share of renewables in final energy consumption to 16% by 2020; iv. to move towards a 20% increase in energy efficiency.
Irish progress (to 2013 unless stated)	8.2% of people in consistent poverty. Increase of 310,000 people in combined poverty.	67% (in 2014 from 64.6% in 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 6.9% in 2014 (11.7% in 2009) ii. 52.2% in 2014 (49%, 2009) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 41.38 million tonnes of CO² (from 46.99 in 2005 – target of 37.5 million tonnes by 2020) ii. 7.8% (from 5.2% in 2010)

Table C: Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland 2015

The Country Specific Recommendations (as endorsed by the Heads of State) are:

1. Ensure a durable correction of the excessive deficit in 2015. Achieve a fiscal adjustment of 0,6 % of GDP towards the medium-term budgetary objective in 2016. Use windfall gains from better-than-expected economic and financial conditions to accelerate the deficit reduction and debt reduction. Limit the existing discretionary powers to change expenditure ceilings beyond specific and predefined contingencies. Broaden the tax base and review tax expenditures, including on value-added taxes.
2. Take measures to increase the cost-effectiveness of the healthcare system, including by reducing spending on patented medicines and gradually implementing adequate prescription practices. Roll out activity-based funding throughout the public hospital system.
3. Take steps to increase the work-intensity of households and to address the poverty risk of children by tapering the withdrawal of benefits and supplementary payments upon return to employment and through better access to affordable full-time childcare.
4. Finalise durable restructuring solutions for a vast majority of mortgages in arrears by end-2015 and strengthen the monitoring arrangements by the Central Bank of Ireland. Ensure that restructuring solutions for loans to distressed SMEs and residual commercial real-estate loans are sustainable by further assessing banks' performance against own targets. Take the necessary steps to ensure that a central credit registry is operational by 2016

Part 3

Other Recent EU Developments

This section briefly highlights some of the key EU developments which have taken place since last October when the current European Commission began their 5 year term. These are the developments which could have a positive impact on poverty reduction in the EU but are far from the integrated strategy called for by EAPN.

1. A New Start for Europe

Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change⁹

On July 15th 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, unveiled his Political Guidelines for the next European Commission. The introduction highlights growing unemployment levels, increased lack of trust in the European project, and “a lack of social fairness”. The Guidelines contain 10 priorities as follows:

1. A New Boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment
2. A Connected Digital Single Market
3. A Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy
4. A Deeper and Fairer Internal Market with a Strengthened Industrial Base
5. A Deeper and Fairer Economic and Monetary Union
6. A Reasonable and Balanced Free Trade Agreement with the U.S.
7. An Area of Justice and Fundamental Rights Based on Mutual Trust
8. Towards a New Policy on Migration
9. A Stronger Global Actor
10. A Union of Democratic Change

2. EU Investment Plan¹⁰

The new European Commission has prioritised investment as part of its programme. The main element of the Investment Plan is the European Fund for Strategic Investment. The focus is on encouraging investment in key areas such as infrastructure, education, research and innovation, as well as finance for small businesses using €21bn from the EU to encourage private investment with the aim of mobilising at

⁹ <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/jean-claude-juncker---political-guidelines.pdf>

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/jobs-growth-investment/plan/index_en.htm

least €315bn over three years. Apart from the potential for job creation it is still not clear what social benefit there will be. EAPN (Europe) has produced a briefing on the Investment Plan¹¹.

3. EU 5 Presidents' Report

“Completing Europe’s Economic and Monetary Union”¹².

The aim of the report is to outline a plan for strengthening the Euro area and bring the economies and budget situations of the countries in the area closer involving greater joint decision making. It includes the goal of earning ‘Social Triple A’. This includes focusing on issues in terms of employment but also highlight issues beyond this including “to ensure that every citizen has access to an adequate education and that an effective social protection system is in place to protect the most vulnerable in society, including a ‘social protection floor’”. There is no clarity on how these areas are to be achieved.

4. Structural Funds

Ireland has begun the implementation of its European Structural and Investment (ESI) Fund programmes for 2014-2020. The Programme in Ireland is coordinated by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the broad policy context and a summary of the Programmes and how they will be implemented is outlined in the Partnership Agreement 2014 -2020¹³. The ESI is to support the achievement of the EUs Europe 2020 Strategy. The total EU contribution to Ireland for the Programme is €1.19 billion (8% higher than for 2008-2013) but the overall budget, including co-financing, is €3.5 billion. Ireland has two regional programmes namely the Border, Midland and Western Region and the Southern and Eastern Region funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and one national European Social Fund (ESF) programme known as the Programme for Employment Innovation and Learning (PEIL)¹⁴ which was launched in April 2015. EU rules mean that 20% of the ESF programme must be used to address poverty and social exclusion. Ireland also has a Peace IV Programme¹⁵ and is a partner in six European Territorial Co-operation Programmes. At the same time, Ireland also has Rural Development Programme including €2.2 billion from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Fund (of which €152.7m is for LEADER, which including co-financing totals €235m) and €148 million from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, also for 2014-2020. Further information is also available on the European Commission website¹⁶.

Part 4

Further Information

- European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland: www.eapn.ie
- European Anti-Poverty Network (Europe): <http://www.eapn.eu/en>
- Better Europe Alliance: Irish Civil Society Organisations for a Social and Sustainable Europe, involves a range of social and equality NGOs (including EAPN Ireland), the Environmental Pillar and the SIPTU trade union. Documents on www.eapn.ie including latest Response to 2015 Country Specific Recommendations for Ireland. <http://www.eapn.ie/eapn/response-to-2015-country-specific-recommendations-for-ireland> .
- European Commission website on European Semester: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/economic_governance/the_european_semester/index_en.htm
- European Commission website on Europe 2020: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

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¹¹ <http://www.eapn.eu/en/news-and-publications/publications/eapn-position-papers-and-reports/juncker-s-eu-investment-plan-and-the-european-fund-for-strategic-investment-efsi-eapn-briefing>

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/economic-monetary-union/docs/5-presidents-report_en.pdf

¹³ <http://www.per.gov.ie/eu-cohesion-policy-2014-2020/>

¹⁴ <file:///C:/Users/Paul/Downloads/EU%20accepted%20version%20via%20SFC.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.seupb.eu/Home.aspx>

¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/ireland