



FEANTSA

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For Immediate Release

European Union Neglects Poverty in the 2015 CSRs

FEANTSA is disappointed that poverty has been sidelined in the 2015 Country Specific Recommendations. We call for urgent action at EU-level to better support progress in the fight against poverty.

On the 13th May 2015, the European Commission published its Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs). CSRs are a key part of the European Semester, the annual cycle of EU-level economic and social policy coordination. According to the Commission, 6 countries received CSRs on poverty and social inclusion (BG, CZ, HU, IE, RO, SK), compared to 12 last year. FEANTSA is shocked by this 50% reduction at a time when poverty remains such a huge challenge for the EU.

The selection of countries that received poverty and social inclusion CSRs in 2015 is strikingly inconsistent in terms of actual trends. Whilst BG and RO do have very high rates of people experiencing poverty compared to the EU average (48% and 40%), EUSILC data actually shows a slight decrease in both countries since the last round of CSRs (-1.3%). Moreover, some countries that have been left out since last year continue to have high or even increasing rates of poverty (ES, UK, PT). Others that received poverty CSRs have stabilized poverty levels since the crisis (IE) or have stable levels in a context of long term downward trends (CZ, SK). FEANTSA's overall assessment is that the Commission is failing to adequately capture the social reality in Member States, and therefore to make appropriate recommendations.

A key concern for FEANTSA is that the content of the so-called poverty recommendations is in fact predominantly focused on activation and/or education. Despite a couple of references to minimum income, the overall picture appears to be that policy interventions to directly address poverty are not a priority. The Commission has certainly not called for proper social investment in active inclusion strategies or to address the dramatic increases in homelessness and extreme poverty occurring in some Member States. Furthermore, other recommendations re. structural reforms, fiscal consolidation and competitiveness are likely to increase the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The timing of the Semester has been reorganized by the Juncker Commission, supposedly to allow more time for analysis between reporting and recommendations. The College has been working hard this year to promote the legitimacy of the Semester at national level. However, on the basis of the CSRs, FEANTSA can only conclude that there has been a failure to deliver a more consistent, credible and socially relevant process. This risks further weakening the legitimacy of the EU in the eyes of citizens. The European Parliament has called for a strengthening of the anti-poverty dimension of the Semester, including more focus on homelessness. So far, this call has not been responded to and the Parliament remains peripheral to the process. Strikingly, Member States continue to see poverty and homelessness as priorities for the Semester. 10 countries reported on policies to address homelessness in their NRPs.

FEANTSA calls on the Commission to take urgent action to address the "poverty gap" that is increasingly evident in the Semester. The EU urgently needs more workable mechanisms and stronger political commitment to deliver progress in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

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Notes for Editors:

1. FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless. It is an umbrella of not-for-profit organisations which participate in or contribute to the fight against homelessness in Europe. www.feantsa.org