



emmaus  
EUROPE

ACTIVISTS FOR CHANGE

To Charles Michel,  
President of the European Council

25 March 2020

Mister President,

**Re: EAPN calls for European leaders to clearly focus on protecting the most vulnerable from the impacts of Covid19 – for European Council 26 March 2020**

I'm writing to you on behalf of Emmaus Europe a social and environmental organisation which struggles to tackle the causes of poverty with its members in 20 countries in Europe. We are part of the [European Anti-Poverty Network](#) (EAPN), the largest platform of anti-poverty organizations in Europe, representing more than 6000 organisations across 32 countries, working with and for people with direct experience of poverty. In **advance of Council discussions on the socio-economic impacts of Covid19**, we highlight our key **messages and recommendations for national and EU action**.

EAPN and its members are concerned at the **social and economic consequences** of Covid19 **on people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, their families, and other highly vulnerable groups**, who are hit the hardest by the current crisis and need urgent support. We released a [statement](#) on 17 March, calling on all governments to coordinate their activities within their countries and across the EU to fight the further spread of the virus in order to protect the health and life of our citizens, and to protect and support the poor, sick and most vulnerable. Today, we write to bring this statement to the attention of all European leaders.

Our statement sets out clearly the groups which are most at risk during this crisis (**people facing poverty in low paid, precarious jobs and the unemployed, particularly households with children, older people, the sick, persons with disabilities, homeless people and migrants**) and the clear socio-economic impacts they will face – **severe loss of income**, increased **social isolation**, and for homeless people, **increased exposure to the virus because of a lack of space to practise social distancing**, and **operations providing food and support to other vulnerable groups having been forced to close throughout Europe**. We share 4 immediate priorities for Member States:

1. **Urgent and coordinated health action**, focusing on protecting the most vulnerable
2. **Urgent action to protect workers and ensure adequate income for all**, including financial support to keep people in their jobs, with guaranteed income, increased minimum income support to address additional costs, guaranteed income support to self-employed or those in atypical work who are losing income due to the crisis
3. **Urgent action to protect people at risk of poverty**, including suspension on evictions due to non-payment of rents and mortgages, supporting payment of energy bills, and continued free provision of school meals for those who need it.
4. **Actions to mitigate the social impact of containment measures on social isolation and loneliness**, including urgent support to social NGOs who provide care and support services, and setting up of nationwide helplines for social and psychological support to address an

increased risk of domestic violence and abuse, especially against women, under quarantine conditions

EAPN further calls on all EU MS to show practical solidarity with each other in the next weeks and months to ensure that medicines, medical infrastructure, test kits, personal protective equipment for the health

professionals and all workers in health and social care, laboratory capacities and the technical expertise is available in the countries and regions where they are most needed.

We welcome the **Commission's Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative**, and [EU finance ministers<sup>1</sup> support](#) for the activation of the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP)<sup>2</sup> which will allow Member States flexibility to use public budgets to respond effectively. However, more is needed. We call on members of the EU Council to agree to use EU and Member State funds to launch a massive public investment initiative, on the lines of the Marshall Plan, as proposed by the Spanish Government <sup>3</sup>to protect people experiencing poverty, strengthen national public health and social protection systems and support the economy through this crisis. Huge amounts of money were made available in 2008 to support the banks – it is now crucial to show that Europe really cares for its people, by providing massive financial support to protect people through this crisis.

We reiterate that only countries with strong, universal public health care systems and strong social protection systems (including and minimum income schemes) can deal with such a crisis. We urge the European Council to send a strong message, clearly prioritizing and committing to urgent actions to protect the most vulnerable and recognising the need to strengthen social protection systems in order to deal with future crises.

The burden for this crisis should not, once again, fall on the shoulders of the poor and middle classes. We must learn the lessons of the 2008 crisis and come out of this with a sense of greater solidarity, recognising that our governments and institutions have listened to citizens and prioritised the protection of the most vulnerable throughout this crisis and beyond. This will mean both providing emergency support to those who are affected, as well as creating support structures that can alleviate the effects – including adequate, accessible and enabling minimum income schemes in every country, and strong social protection systems. The burden to finance these initiatives must fall mainly on the wealthy, reducing inequality between the 1% and the 99%. Now is the time to increase progressivity in tax systems, support the EU corporation tax proposal, move forward on an EU Financial Transactions Tax, close loop holes on tax havens and support a wealth tax – this would all contribute to the creation of such a Marshall Plan to tackle Covid19 and rebuild Europe.

Yours sincerely,



Carina Aaltoneen, Chair of Emmaus Europe  
Member organisation of EAPN

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of EU Finance Ministers 23.03.2020

<sup>2</sup> [EC Press Release \(20.03.2020\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [El Pais/23.03.2020](#).