



National Poverty Watch Report 2020

EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK (EAPN) France

FRANCE



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I. Introduction

The EAPN network is a European network dedicated to the fight against poverty which was created in 1990 under the presidency of Jacques Delors, then President of the European Commission. The network consists of 31 national networks of national, regional and local associations and 18 major European associations. Its activity is to make the fight against poverty one of the priorities of the European Union and, ultimately, to eradicate poverty and social exclusion. The participation of people experiencing poverty is one of the major axes of its action.

EAPN France is the French branch of EAPN Europe. It brings together national associations and regional associative collectives in the solidarity sector which manage for some numerous social and medico-social institutions and structures. These regional associations and collectives contribute to the integration of the most vulnerable through housing, employment, economic activity, language acquisition or recreation. The UNIOPSS (National Interfederal Union of Private Health and Social Works and Bodies) is at the origin of the foundation of the European Anti-Poverty Network – EAPN Europe and EAPN France.

The EAPN France network has four main objectives:

- 1) To have the possibility recognized, for people furthest from employment, to work again one day;
- 2) The recognition of the right of the most vulnerable to adequate, stable and predictable resources through the existence of an adequate minimum income;
- 3) Recognize the right to have quality social services for all with support for the most vulnerable;
- 4) Strengthen the recognition of the word of the fragile and poor in the formulation of policies that concern them by dedicating their “expert” capacity in the field.

The current work of EAPN France focuses on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the access of all to sustainable food, the establishment of a European minimum income, the resolution of housing problems, access to education and culture and the link with other national EAPN. Since the start of Mr. Guy Janvier’s Presidency in 2016, EAPN France has focused its mission on three specific themes: the right to food, the universal minimum income and the participation of people experiencing poverty.

The *National Poverty Watch Report and 2020 COVID-19 Update* is intended to provide an overview of the situation of poverty and social exclusion in France. This year’s main theme is the exceptional health crisis. This document can serve as a basis for the European Semester process and therefore for a new European post-2020 strategy. The objectives are to identify key trends and policies on poverty and social exclusion in Europe, raise awareness of priority issues and the reality of people facing poverty and propose concrete recommendations. Its vocation is to raise public awareness and to allow the construction of a real social Europe in the long term.

II. Poverty and its measures

The concept of poverty relates to a given time and society. According to the Treasury of the French Language, poverty is “the state, the condition of a person who lacks resources, material means to lead a decent life”. According to the European Council of December 1984, “people whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so weak that they are excluded from the minimum acceptable lifestyles in society are considered poor”. Joseph Wresinski¹, at the 1987 Economic and Social Council, considered that precariousness is the absence of one or more of the safeguards that allow individuals and families to assume their basic responsibilities and enjoy their fundamental rights. The resulting insecurity may be more or less serious and permanent. It most often leads to great poverty when it affects several areas of life, tends to be prolonged over time and becomes persistent, seriously compromises the chances of regaining one’s rights and reassuring one’s responsibilities by oneself-even in the foreseeable future”.

EU Member States have agreed on a set of criteria known as the Laeken criteria in 2001 in order to measure poverty more objectively. The European poverty line has been set at 60% of median income. In Europe, according to this threshold, there are 17.3% of poor people, i.e. 87 million poor people in 2016². This is the most widespread form of poverty. Income inequality also remains high in Europe.³

According to the INSEE (National Institute of Statistics in France), “an individual (or a household) is considered poor when living in a household whose standard of living is below the poverty line”. The poverty line is therefore set at €1,026, but it also publishes poverty rates according to other thresholds (40%, 50% or 70%), in accordance with the recommendations of the CNIS (National Council for Statistical Information) report. The Inequality Observatory uses, for example, the threshold of 50% of the median standard of living, i.e. €855. According to this criterion, there are 5 million poor people in France.

The monetary approach has its limitations because it cannot account for poverty at the given time: if the median income increases faster than the income of the poor, then poverty increases. Moreover, it cannot account for the situation of the poorest among the poor; it is therefore very limited and other indicators such as living conditions, access to rights, health, housing or culture, leisure activities must be taken into account. This approach does not take into account disparities in charges, including property repayments and territorial inequalities.

Poverty in living conditions is defined as met criteria. According to the INSEE, a person is poor in living conditions if he or she accumulates at least 8 out of 27 difficulties. Finally, absolute poverty is what it takes to live with dignity, that is to say, the goods and services indispensable to a dignified life. In France, the law defines the list of elusive goods (clothing, mattresses, for

¹ Wresinski, J., *Report “Grande pauvreté et précarité économique et sociale”*, presented to the French economic and social Council on 10th and 11th February 1987, <https://www.atd-quartmonde.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/RapportWresinski87-GrandePauvreteEtPrecariteSociale.pdf>

² See Eurostat (2017) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Income_poverty_statistics/fr&oldid=417506#Taux_et_seuil_de_risque_de_pauvret.C3.A9.

³ The INSEE's calculation is made in consumption units, see definition: <https://www.insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c1802>

example). Housing isn't one of them. ONPES (national observatory of poverty and social exclusion) has established "reference budgets" that is, what it takes to participate effectively in social life (about €1,400 per person).

AROPE is the instrument used by the European Commission to measure poverty and combines the following criteria:

- At-risk-of-poverty, which measures the percentage of people living in a household with a net disposable income below 60% of the median standard of living.
- Serious material deprivation: one cannot afford certain goods that are normally necessary to lead a decent life in a given society (starting from 4 out of 9 categories of goods).
- The proportion of people of working age who actually work in a household.

We are in a AROPE situation when at least one of the three factors is combined. Some people combine all the factors. The Social Scoreboard which is the tool of the European Commission since March 2018 to compare the States of the Union in the areas affected by the European Pillar of Social Rights has added two factors: the serious deprivation of housing (indecent housing, too small, without sanitation) and the risk of poverty while working (income below 60% of the median standard of living).

Income inequality can also be measured using the GINI⁴ coefficient and the S80/S20 ratio⁵, or the PALMA index⁶.

Different tools are urgently needed to better understand and analyse poverty. This is why the unanimous adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights by the Member States in November 2017 in Gothenburg, Sweden, should result in the implementation of its 20 principles by Eurostat and the Member States.

III. Recent poverty data and developments

France remains one of the European countries with the lowest poverty (monetary and living conditions). France is one of the European countries with the lowest rate of extreme poverty (at 40% of the median standard of living): 3.1% of the population is concerned according to Eurostat in 2015, compared to a European average of 6.4%⁷. 12.7% of the population is in a situation of material and social deprivation and 13.6% in monetary poverty. Over the last ten years or so, the number of poor people in France has increased to reach more than 9 million in

⁴ The Gini index (or coefficient) is a synthetic indicator that makes it possible to account for the level of inequality for a variable and over a given population. It varies between 0 (perfect equality) and 1 (extreme inequality).

⁵ The S80/S20 ratio measures the relative disparity in the distribution of a given quantity (wage, income, standard of living). Thus, for an income distribution, S80/S20 relates the mass of income held by the richest 20% of individuals to that held by the poorest 20%.

⁶ The Palma index is the sum of the income (measured according to various definitions) earned by the individuals or households in the top decile (the top 10%) divided by the sum of the income earned by the bottom 40% of households.

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Income_poverty_statistics/fr&oldid=417506

2018, i.e. more than 14% of the total population⁸. This aggravation is one of the most striking phenomena among the trends analysed by the Inequality Observatory.

Among the poor, there are 2 million young people without jobs or education (the so-called “NEETS”). One third of the poor are single-parent families (mostly single women), the unemployed are five times poorer. There are 2 million beneficiaries of the RSA (active solidarity income), half of whom have been poor for more than 4 years.

The individuals affected by monetary poverty and material and social deprivation are not necessarily the same but there are many socio-demographic characteristics in common. In addition, some poor people are far from any statistical registration system: the homeless⁹, the undocumented, the Roma people. Some, including many young people, live on family support or are housed in student communities. They are not entitled to the RSA and therefore often have zero resources.

“Legal” poverty, on the other hand, describes the situation of people who are supported by society by paying them a minimum income that is supposed to allow them to live decently. In France, there are 7 million people who receive minimum social benefits or who are entitled to them (spouses, children, etc.). Thus, the allowances reduce the number of poor people by 5 million. The French model therefore absorbs the shock even if the use of data on social minima to measure the evolution of poverty is not entirely valid, because the rules of allocation do not remain the same over the long term.¹⁰

According to the 2018 report on poverty in France by the Observatoire des inégalités, poverty is not frozen. So, four years after becoming poor, 80% of people are no longer poor. A major entry or exit event in poverty is the loss or access to employment. In total, social benefits in France represent more than 32% of GDP while the average for the European Union as a whole is around 27.5%.

As part of the European Semester, the Commission’s findings in its Contry Report on France showed that the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion continued to decline but income inequality increased. Progress remains to be made in integrating the most vulnerable categories of workers into the labour market. In the remaining challenges, the unemployment rate remains high, particularly for certain disadvantaged groups such as young people, immigrants and low-skilled people. In addition, there is a low rate of transition from temporary to open-ended contracts: only 12.1% in 2018. Low-skilled employment opportunities are also declining, particularly due to gradual digitization in the tertiary sector and major layoffs during the COVID-19 crisis, especially in the hotel sector, restaurants, tourism and the night life.

IV. What are the key issues and priorities?

Measures had already been taken in response to the mobilization of the “yellow jackets” such as the cancellation of the increase in the carbon tax, the accelerated or extended implementation of measures planned for the entire five-year period (increase in the activity bonus, tax exemption for overtime), the elimination of the CSG (generalized social contribution) increase

⁸ According to the report on poverty in France by the Inequality Observatory (2018).

⁹ There was only one INSEE survey in 2012 on the census of homeless people.

¹⁰ According to the report on poverty in France by the Inequality Observatory (2018).

for average pensions and a tax-free bonus of up to 1,000 euros. These amounted to 17 billion euros in 2019.

We have chosen to focus here on recent developments in the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy (1) and government responses to the health crisis (2).

1. The Government Strategy for Poverty Reduction

There is a strategy of prevention and fight against poverty since September 13, 2018, presented by President Macron. It is the successor to a large number of poverty reduction plans that have not produced the expected results. The method is then different, it is strategic and it is not a plan. Its budget is €8.5 billion. The five commitments of this poverty strategy are:

- Equality of opportunity from the first steps.
- Guarantee fundamental rights for children on a daily basis.
- A guaranteed training path for all young people
- More accessible, equitable and incentive-based social rights
- Invest for the accompaniment of all towards employment.

To implement these commitments, the Government has implemented a number of measures in the following categories:

. Addressing inequalities from an early age:

- 1) Breakfast distribution in all priority areas since September 2019, with 100,000 students concerned (this measure depends a lot on the cities and many of them didn't set it up).
- 2) Access to the individual reception of all CMG families from 2019, for the structures from 2022 and the creation of 1380 relay maternal assistants by 2025.
- 3) A training plan for early childhood professionals (600,000 new professionals trained by 2022).
- 4) Achieving Social Diversity in Early Childhood Care: Implementation of the "Social Diversity" Bonus and the "Territory" Bonus for QPV (Priority Areas of City Policy) in January 2019. Current 2020 bonus «territory» for other territories and by 2022 the creation of 30,000 new nursery places.
- 5) The social pricing of canteens at €1 per meal per child for fragile territories since April 1, 2019.

. Support towards employment and autonomy:

- 1) The creation of a public service of insertion (no news on the subject, the reform is paused).
- 2) The roll-out of the Budget Advisory Points: 150 structures were labelled in 2019 and 250 are expected to be labelled in 2020 following the call for events which closed on 31 July.
- 3) The obligation of training up to 18 years since the decree of August 5, 2020.

- 4) The training plan for social workers: from 2020, 9.5 million euros will be dedicated by the State to the co-financing of this plan which will allow the training of 50,000 professionals each year.
- 5) Support for the exit from social assistance for children from 2019

. Facilitating access to rights:

- 1) Support for RSA beneficiaries, notably through the deployment of the Business Guarantee, a new form of support for 300,000 people by 2022.
- 2) The implementation of the universal income of activity paused since the close of the 4th cycle of the institutional consultation.
- 3) The automatic renewal of the Complementary health solidarity for beneficiaries of the RSA since April 1, 2019.

2. The Government Responses to the Health Crisis

According to INSEE, the COVID-19 statistics showed that the financial situation of the most modest has often deteriorated (30% for the poorest quintile¹¹), that women have provided a large share of childcare and that single people have found confinement more painful. All of these people, especially the young, therefore come out of it very weakened, often in situations of debt, unpaid bills or payment difficulties leading to the risk of eviction. For some of them, they no longer have access to essential goods or health care, which further deteriorates their living conditions and purchasing power. The social crisis that was revealed by the Yellow Vests at the end of 2018 has been amplified by the health crisis. Precarious people are and will remain the first victims of the economic crisis that will affect the country: cuts in low-skilled jobs, temporary work, difficulties in finding employment, particularly for young people and the long-term unemployed who are already weakened in the job market: according to the OECD, the impact on employment was ten times greater in the first three months of the health crisis than in the first three months of the 2007-2008 economic crisis.

The Food Bank network anticipates an increase in the demand for food aid in the coming months: current forecasts indicate that nearly 8 million people will use food aid, compared to 5.5 million at the moment. It should be reminded that in 2008, the consequences of the economic crisis led to an increase in the demand for food aid: in 2008, there were 2.8 million beneficiaries, 3.5 million in 2010, rising to 5.5 million in 2019. In addition, more than 4 million people are poorly housed. Some French local authorities (cities, regions) have set up food aid to replace school canteens for children from modest families. The closing of schools due to the COVID-19 epidemic has led families whose children used to attend the canteen to have to feed them every day at lunch. This new situation may create economic problems for the poorest families. There have been appeals for donations in Marseille, the introduction of food vouchers in Brest and the delivery of meals in the département of Meurthe-et-Moselle (region of Nancy).

The winter truce (housing protection during winter months) had been extended until the beginning of July in France, i.e. until the end of the state of health emergency. However, many NGOs for the right to housing have shown the major risk of eviction in the middle of the

¹¹ The quintile is a portion of the frequency distribution containing one-fifth of the total sample.

pandemic. The social situation due to the health crisis and the increase in job losses led to even greater precariousness and the inability of many low-income households to pay their rent. There has already been a steady increase in evictions in France over the last 30 years. And the summer is a favourable period because of the lack of a « truce ». According to the spokesperson of the Right to Housing, in 2018, nearly 16,000 forced evictions have taken place, representing a 169% increase since 2000¹². We can see that people have fewer options for relocation: more and more people are staying until the end of the procedure, waiting for the police forces to intervene and force them to leave. The most affected are modest tenants with low incomes, people who do the cleaning, work in nursing homes, but also self-employed people with irregular incomes, and young people, families, the elderly.

In response to the health crisis, the government's recovery plan was presented by Prime Minister Jean Castex on September, 3rd. In particular, it provides for the allocation of 35 billion euros to « social and territorial cohesion ». 6 billion of them will be devoted to hospitals and 15 billion of them to employment and in particular to the « youth » plan (6.5 billion euros). The aim is to create an « anti-unemployment shield » which will be deployed in particular through partial long-term activity. The objective is to create 160,000 jobs by 2021. 100 million euros are deployed as part of a government aid scheme for the recruitment of unemployed people with disabilities « without age limit ». Thus, the employer will be entitled to a grant of 4,000 euros for the recruitment of a disabled worker on a contract of at least 3 months and not exceeding twice the minimum wage. The plan « 1 young person, 1 solution » of July, 23rd, is intended to reduce the economic consequences of the health crisis and is the first part of the recovery plan. It consists in particular in building tailor-made integration paths for young people who are far from employment. Aid for the recruitment of young people under the age of 26 will go up to 4,000 euros for a contract of at least 3 months and for a salary not exceeding twice the minimum wage. 20 billion is earmarked for measures to support the most disadvantaged and purchasing power. The back-to-school allowance has been increased by 100 euros. The poverty and anti-exclusion plan has been allocated an additional 200 million euros and 1 billion euros in additional resources allocated to training (for the growth sectors).

According to the press release of the « ALERTE » group (34 national federations and associations fighting poverty and exclusion, members of the UNIOPSS anti-poverty commission and local inter-associative groups present in 10 regions), the recovery plan ignores the most precarious people. Less than 1% of the 100 billion released under this plan is dedicated to the poorest people. Much more ambitious policies should be developed in France in order to structurally eradicate poverty. Quarantine could have dramatic consequences such as the loss of jobs and income, the reduction of activity, the increase in charges during the quarantine, debt, unpaid rent, the drastic reduction of the rest to live on which pushes more and more people towards food distribution places, dropping school and mortality excesses.

¹² https://www.liberation.fr/france/2020/07/14/fin-de-la-treve-hivernale-on-encourage-les-locataires-a-exiger-d-etre-reloges_1794176

V. What are the respective roles of the European Union and the French government?

The European Pillar for Social rights was adopted on 17 November 2017 in Gothenburg (Sweden). It contains 3 main parts:

- Equal opportunities and access to the labour market
- Fair working conditions
- Social protection and social inclusion

The future of Social Europe is set out in the Commission's white Paper on the future of Europe. The role of the European Union is to support and complement Member States' national policies on social inclusion and social protection. The European Union can then provide political guidance and financial support for reforms. The tools for implementing the principles of the pillar regulations, through which it can force States to apply the provisions of the Social Pillar, the policy coordination mechanism, via the European Semester and the recommendations per country, and the budget made available for social policies. In 2010, the fight against poverty and social exclusion was added to the Europe 2020 Strategy, which is the EU's jobs and growth agenda (and which focuses on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth). One of the targets was to reduce the number of AROPE people of 20 million by 2020. EU-SILC is the EU's system of statistics on income and living conditions in the European Union. It is part of the Community action programme to fight social exclusion and provides the statistical material for the European Commission's annual synthesis report on these issues. The Regulation provides for « primary » (demography, income, social exclusion, work, housing, education, health) and « secondary » (material deprivation of children, indebtedness, subjective well-being, etc. ;) areas of social exclusion. Since 2017 there is a new indicator of material and social deprivation in the EU. It is the proportion of people living in ordinary households (excluding collective housing and mobile homes) unable to cover the expenses related to at least 5 out of 13¹³ elements of daily life.

If the European Union can provide interesting documentation about the social institution in Europe and if it can make important recommendations to the Member States, it is indeed the Member States that have the priority to act.

¹³ These 13 elements are : - Not being able to cope with unexpected expenses.

- Not being able to afford a week's vacation away from home.
- Not being able to replace furniture that is no longer in use.
- Not being able to spend a small amount of money for oneself without having to consult anyone.
- Not being able to have a regular leisure activity.
- Having unpaid monthly loan payments, rent, electricity, water or gas bills.
- Not being able to buy new clothes.
- Not being able to have a meal containing protein at least every other day.
- Not being able to have two pairs of good shoes.
- Not being able to keep your home at a good temperature.
- Not being able to meet with friends or family at least once a month for a drink or a meal.
- Not having a personal car.
- Not having access to the Internet.

<https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3902325?sommaire=3902446>

VI. The role of EAPN and its key recommendations

The French delegation is mobilized with regard to strategies against poverty. EAPN France has set up working groups focusing on the three themes adopted by its General Assembly: the right to food, the participation of people experiencing poverty and social minima. EAPN France is also involved, for example, in the EMIN project, launched by EAPN Europe, which aims to raise the awareness of public authorities and civil society on the issue of minimum income.

The main theme of the poverty report commissioned by EAPN Europe is the impact of COVID-19 on people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

However, EAPN France would also like to see the experimentation of Territoires Zéro Chômeur de Longue Durée (Zero Long-Term Unemployed Territories) extended. The second bill is being debated in mid-September in the National Assembly. Vigorous measures are also needed for access to housing and accommodation for homeless people, including asylum seekers and refugees.

With regard to the Universal Activity Income, it is regrettable that its implementation has been (maybe temporarily) abandoned. Indeed, and all the more so in the wake of the health crisis, a universal income could enable everyone to live in dignity. It should merge several social benefits into a single means-tested and activity-based allocation. Reducing poverty means above all guaranteeing access to fundamental rights for everyone and establishing a global policy that would include health, housing, food, employment, education and culture. A minimum income must guarantee every adult the « adequate means of subsistence » that are enshrined in the French Constitution. That is to say, the allowance must be above all sufficient. A person in France should not have to live on less than 50% of the median income, i.e. 855 euros for a single person. Young people do not benefit from the RSA and a quarter of them live below the poverty line. While the simplification of social benefits is essential, not all of them should be recast. For example, housing allowance, disabled adults and solidarity for the elderly allowances should remain independent because they are not always automatically combined with a poverty situation. Integration shall not be combined with stigmatisation of people in precarious situations¹⁴.

The right to food is also a fundamental issue for EAPN France.¹⁵ Indeed, the current model of agricultural production is unsustainable. A third of French farmers are poor and live with less than 350 euros a month. On average, only 8% of the food price paid by the consumers goes to the producer. 8 million people are in food insecurity. There is no constitutional protection of the right to food. Articles 10 and 11 of the preamble of the Constitution of 27 October 1946 have not been interpreted in this sense. The national food programme makes no reference to this right. The opinion of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of 10 February 2014 and the Act of 13 October 2014 are only declaratory in scope. There is no recognition at the European level either. The reform of the CAP (common Agricultural Policy) should take this

¹⁴ This apparently seductive idea is contested by some experts, including Jean-Claude Barbier. https://www.persee.fr/doc/caf_2101-8081_2011_num_104_1_2595

¹⁵ See our study on the right to food on our website: http://eapn.fr/eapn-france-sengage-reconnaissance-dun-droit-a-l'alimentation-france/#_ftn2

into account. The system for monitoring food insecurity is deficient. An observatory of food insecurity should be set up and it would be responsible for diagnosing situations to be included in territorial food plans. An article of the law could also be included in one of the components of the fight against exclusion. There is a problem of food aid supply in the agro-industry and this is a framework and a model that creates poverty. We need to build a logic of food democracy. Food aid was transferred from the Rural Code to the Code of Social Action and Families¹⁶. A third of French peasants are poor and a significant number of them, not precisely known, in our opinion, benefit from food aid¹⁷!

The fight against poverty must also be seen as a profitable and indispensable investment in the economic and social needs of the most precarious in order to fight growing poverty. Finally, it is proposed to significantly increase the minimum income and to open it from the age of 18, to increase the value of the housing aid taking into account unpaid rent, to open access to healthcare to all and health rights to foreigners, to invest in Integration through Economic Activity and assisted contracts and to fight against social isolation. Like EAPN Europe, EAPN France believes that poverty and social exclusion constitute a denial of fundamental rights and a failure to respect and protect human dignity.

VII. Conclusion

Even if France is not the country most affected by poverty thanks to our social protection system, which enables the most vulnerable to avoid falling into extreme poverty, the health crisis we have just experienced has aggravated situations of exclusion and persistent inequalities. These problems are common to all the countries of the European Union, which, although it does not have the competence to compel States to take action, has become aware in recent years of the importance of its social dimension in order to preserve the cohesion of peoples, but also to maintain its existence.

While EAPN France, like EAPN Europe and its partners and members in France and in Europe, is generally disappointed by the lack of action at European and national level to combat poverty and social exclusion effectively and in a sustainable way, it does not lose hope as to the usefulness of its efforts and actions and intends to continue its commitment in the diversity of areas affected by poverty.

Perhaps the consultations proposed in 2020 by the European Commission on the action plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Child Guarantee may bring some progress in the long march for social Europe.

¹⁶ Decree No. 2019-703 of July 4, 2019 relating to the fight against food insecurity, which amends the Code of Social Action and Families.

¹⁷ According to MSA (agricultural social mutuality).

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