

MINIMUM INCOME SCHEMES

A VITAL SAFETY NET

What Minimum Income Schemes are

A Minimum Income Scheme (MIS) is an income support benefit, which should offer a way out of poverty. It targets people unable to work or to get a decent job as well as people not earning enough in their job or no longer entitled to other benefits. It should offer a decent life for all so that everyone can be part of society.

All EU Member States have some kind of Minimum Income Scheme (often known as social assistance). In most cases they do not allow people to lead a decent life. For example MISs are below the poverty line, are too hard to apply for or unknown to likely applicants. They can also be in competition with other benefits, like child benefit, which are also badly needed. Finally, MISs often make conditions on people to find work too difficult.

Only two EU countries – Ireland and the Netherlands – provide minimum income above the poverty line (for some types of household only). In seven countries the minimum income is below 40% of the average household income in those countries.

Why they are vital

They are essential for social protection for everybody. **If well-designed**, they help people to live decent lives throughout their whole lifetime. They help stop the shameful rise in people working and still not having a decent pay, income and life. And they allow all people to be more equal and to participate in society, and make all countries in Europe more equal. They are also good for the economy, as the income is spent straight away.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS HITTING THOSE IN (OR AT RISK OF) POVERTY THE HARDEST

The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion* across the EU remains extremely high: in 2019 about 92 million people or more than one in five of the total population.

*(ARPE)

The pandemic will further increase this number, to about 22% of people living in (or at risk of) poverty. MIS are even more vital right now in order to provide a decent safety net for those suffering from poverty. Even more, they will be a just way out of the crisis.

How they should be designed to reduce poverty

ADEQUATE

- Providing enough money to take people out of poverty and above 60% of the average household income for each country.

ACCESSIBLE

- Easily available and known to all groups of people that need them;
- Allows them to use their rights;
- With easily understandable procedures;
- With clear information about the effect on other benefits.

ENABLING

- Taking into account each individual's particular circumstances and needs;
- Other key social rights; e.g. decent housing, education, affordable healthcare, must stay in place;
- No conditions imposed on Minimum Income just to force people into any job;
- The personalized support to get people into good quality employment - with decent pay and good social protection -, where that's possible, should happen quickly.

“ *The Minimum Income Scheme was clearly not enough but it allowed me to feed my children and to ensure they could continue with their education.* ”

Cidália Barriga, Expert by Experience, Portugal

How change can be achieved throughout the EU

EU “soft law” (principles, rather than laws) has not led to less poverty, nor can all Europeans expect any guarantee of decent employment or good working or living conditions. This needs urgent action at EU and national level. Denying people a decent income is a violation of a human and social right. Minimum Income Schemes should be seen as a support for those who cannot work, and a support into work for those who can - rather than discouraging work. Minimum Wages should be higher than decent minimum income benefits and unfair 'conditionalities' removed.

EAPN calls for:

- **An EU Framework Directive** on adequate minimum income** to translate the right to an adequate minimum income for all over the life-course into a legally binding commitment.
- **Member States** to guarantee the right to a minimum income for everybody throughout their lives, that is adequate, accessible and enabling by respecting common minimum standards.
- **Decent Minimum Wages levels should be higher than adequate minimum income levels.**

** An EU legal act which commits all countries to achieving something

What you can do

- Join in the campaign on [#EUMinimumIncome](#) & [#EndPoverty](#)
- For more detail see EAPN's [Position Paper on Adequate Income](#).