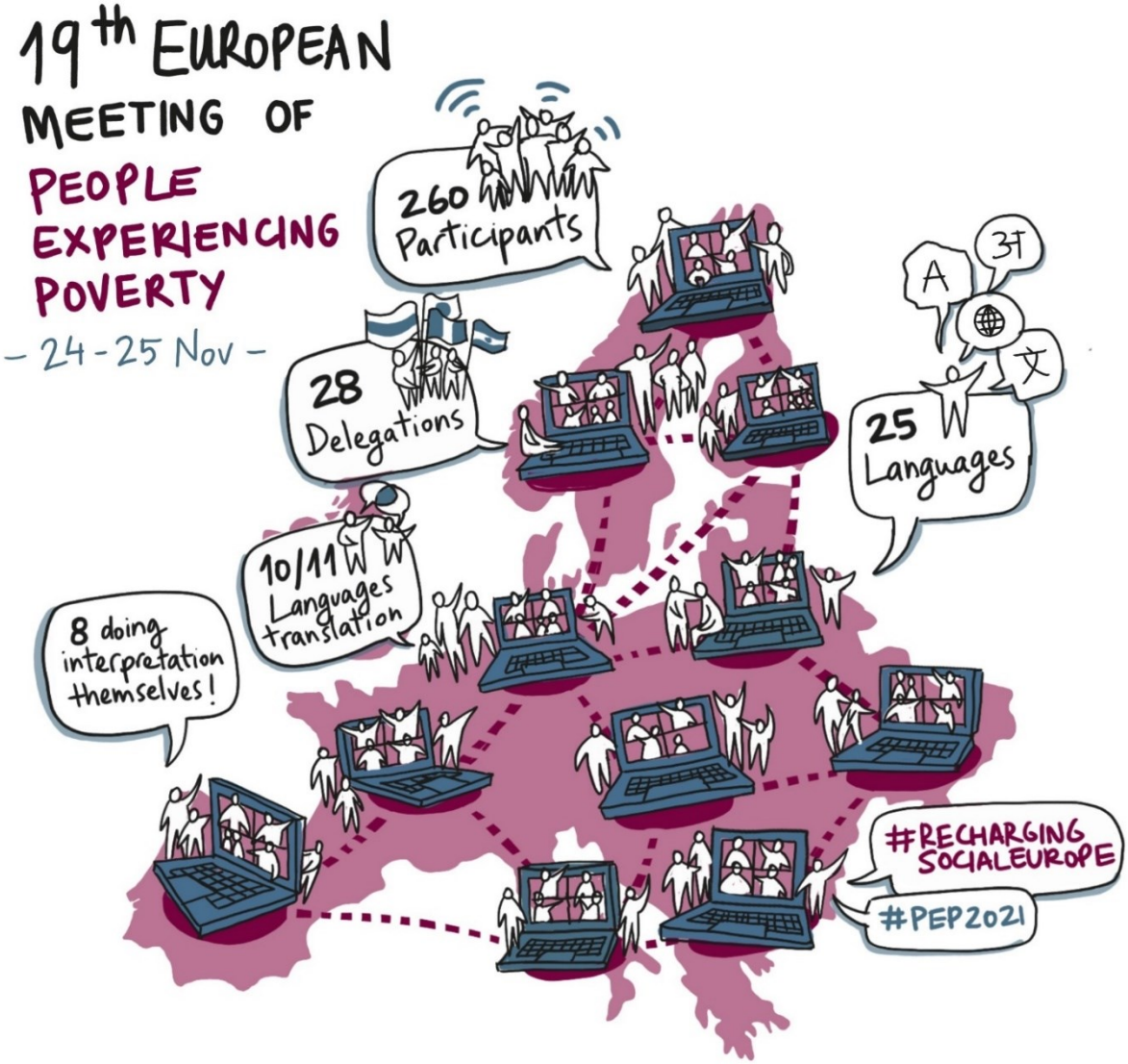
EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

European Commission

EUROPEAN MEETINGS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

LISTEN TO THE EXPERTS OF POVERTY, EXCLUSION AND INEQUALITIES



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19TH EUROPEAN MEETING OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY REPORT

24-25 NOVEMBER 2021

19th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty

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This report summarises the main points and challenges that were highlighted during the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty by the different speakers and participants.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the 24th and 25th of November 2021, the **19th European Meeting of 'People Experiencing Poverty'** (PEP 2021) took place, organised by the European Anti-Poverty Network with the support of the European Commission under the umbrella of *Conference on the Future of Europe: Engaging with citizens to build a more resilient Europe*. The conference brought together around 260 participants over the two days, including national delegations of people experiencing poverty from 28 countries across the EU, policymakers, and representatives of European non-governmental organisations working towards fighting poverty.

The meeting offered the opportunity for people experiencing poverty (PEP) and representatives from organisations supporting them **to share their experiences, concerns, and recommendations** directly with key EU policymakers and politicians. In the 19th edition of the meeting, people experiencing poverty participating in EAPN decided to focus the meeting on the following issues: access to health care, access to minimum income, access to housing, and the digital divide.

This meeting was held virtually to allow a safe way to reflect on the pandemic's impact on PEP. As in previous years, it was designed to be highly participatory. With the support of volunteers and interpreters, the conversations were held in the native language of the participants from **the 28 represented countries** (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, North Macedonia, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden).

The opening plenary session hosted three powerful testimonies from **Dorota Pawłowska**, a member of EAPN Poland, **Famara Cham**, a member of EAPN Spain, and **Astrid Kirchsteiger**, a member of EAPN Austria, where each one shared their personal experiences living in poverty and how they overcame them. **Katarina Ivanković-Knežević,** Director of the Unit Social Rights and Inclusion in DG Employment, listened to their testimonies and shared the plans and actions that the EU is making to respond to poverty and social exclusion.

After the introductory session, participants joined the World Café workshops to discuss access to healthcare, minimum income schemes, housing and digital resources, and to develop key messages and demands in these areas for EU-level policymakers.

The **World Café** methodology enabled participants to explore commonalities and differences in the challenges that people experiencing poverty face across Europe. The cross-fertilisation of ideas was key to finding common patterns emerging from the collective intelligence and identifying the **key messages** shared with policymakers and EU politicians on the following day:

- **Increase public health services** to include mental health services and improve access to them.
- **Adequate minimum income and wage** need to be provided; the current amounts do not cover the cost of living.
- **Close the digital divide** to enable PEP to participate in society.
- **Increase PEP inclusion and participation** in policy decisions across the EU.

The second day's plenary session brought together people experiencing poverty and high-level EU officials to discuss the key messages from the previous day. The EU officials in attendance were as follows: **Pierfrancesco Majorino**, Member of the European Parliament, Socialists & Democrats Group, **Dubravka Šuica**, Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Democracy and Demography, **Ivo Belet**, Cabinet expert of the Vice-President of the EC for Democracy and Demography, **Jean Fabre-Mons**, adviser to Olivier Véran, Minister of Solidarity and Health in France and **Sérgio Aires** representing **Marisa Matias**, Member of the European Parliament, the Left group GUE/NGL.

After hearing the demands from the delegations, policymakers shared possible action plans and ideas to address the issues mentioned.

The main needs and priorities identified were the following:

- An *economy for humans* and a change of the economic paradigm.
- A transversal and integrated approach to different challenges (health, minimum income, housing, and digital services).
- A holistic approach to health such as 100% Health strategy, including specialised medical services (dental, eye, and mental care).
- A strategy to increase the minimum wage and ensure all citizens have access to a decent life.
- More regulation on housing to ensure access and affordability.
- Increase access to digital devices enabling PEP access to basic services.
- Tailored support measures for different regions and households/groups.
- Consider specific outcomes and commitments from participatory meetings with PEP to have an impact on the challenges.

The meeting ended with comments from some national delegations about future actions. They urged for more frequent PEP meetings with increased time for PEP to exchange with networks and policymakers. They also highlighted the importance of ensuring that social funds directly benefit people experiencing poverty. **Fintan Farrell**, the event facilitator, closed by reminding everyone that if we want to build a more social Europe, it is crucial that stakeholders stay engaged and hopeful while working towards an inclusive future.

Delegation from EAPN Estonia

Delegation from EAPN Polonia

II. OPENING PLENARY OF THE PEP MEETING

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The meeting was opened by Carlos Susias, President of EAPN Europe, who welcomed participants and highlighted that the purpose of this gathering is to listen to the analysis of different challenges and situations people face when living in poverty but also to their proposals for solutions and responses. Three EAPN members shared powerful testimonies: **Dorota Pawłowska** from EAPN Poland, **Famara Cham** from EAPN Spain, and **Astrid Kirchsteiger** from EAPN Austria. The conversation was facilitated by **Fintan Farrell,** an independent expert on Social Inclusion with a long history of engagement in European Anti-Poverty networks, who reminded the audience of the impact these meetings have on building a more social Europe. Finally, **Katarina Ivanković-Knežević**, Director of the Unit Social Rights and Inclusion in DG Employment, listened to these experiences and shared the EU's actions to address these challenges. She also thanked the speakers and EAPN for their continuous engagement in improving social policies.

Dorota Pawłowska (from EAPN Poland) shared her own experience of 28 years of living in poverty. She struggled for many years with an unhappy marriage and hard work to take care of her three children and her sick mother. After her mother died, she felt depressed and separated from the world. One day she left home and began living on the streets. She started drinking to soothe her pain and fight the Polish winter cold. She fell ill and was close to death when she called the ambulance that saved her life. After another illness and an operation, she began staying at a women's shelter where she would take care of elderly and sick women, bringing a glimmer of hope to her life.

Finally, with the support of a social worker, a therapist, and a peer group, she found her way again. Earlier this year, after having been sober for many years, she reconnected with her sons. At first, they were reserved, but slowly she earned back their trust. She has now applied for social housing, hoping that one day she will have her children and grandchildren over for a family meal. With the care and support of her friends and family, she has been able to restore her life. In the past couple of years, she has participated in the national meetings of people experiencing poverty organised by EAPN Poland. In her own words:

> ***"It is here that I have met wonderful people, had the opportunity to participate in interesting discussions and formulate my opinions. (National) PEP meetings have become an important tool to help me get back to the life I always wanted".***
>
> *- Dorota Pawłowska (EAPN Poland)*

Famara Cham (from EAPN Spain) shared his experience as an unaccompanied migrant minor coming from Gambia 13 years ago. As a minor, he was under the guardianship of the Community of Madrid and lived in a shared reception flat.
When he turned 18, he stopped receiving support from the state and had to leave the flat. Without any financial resources, sufficient language skills, or the documentation he needed to legally stay and work in the country, he had to live in the streets until some friends hosted him in their shared flat. He then searched for support from one of the educators he had met on arrival, she helped him to get a room in the migration centre where she worked. There, he could continue with his Spanish studies and do some work training in stores. During this time, he managed to get a work permit, access health services, and acquire his first job in the hospitality industry. However, the hours he would work were inconsistent, and he became more anxious when he was cut to part-time.

He then sought out support for training and work from several associations, managing to be trained and placed as an interpreter and social mediator, and became involved in helping other people in similar situations and raising awareness of their plight.

Now he is working in a community action programme with La Rueca and Realidades. Famara works to improve the urban environment, raise awareness in municipal community health centres and mitigate loneliness among the elderly. He develops physical activities, manages conflicts in the neighbourhood, and runs workshops on the digital divide for young people in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Famara has a story of continuously overcoming adversity since he arrived in Spain as a child without his family. In Famara's words:

"Until I was 20 years old, I did not manage to regularise my situation in Madrid, even though I had been protected by the system as a minor".

- Famara Cham (EAPN Spain)

Astrid Kirchsteiger (from EAPN Austria) ran a real estate company in Salzburg before Austria joined the EU. The business was doing well, and she bought a property to build ten residential units through a development activity. A bank loaned her the money because they had a builder interested in her property. Later the bank claimed that progress on the construction was too slow and demanded the payments immediately, but she had sold only two apartments, bankrupting her company. She could have sued the bank for this, but she had no means to do so and could only manage a debt settlement. She lived with her partner in a subsidised apartment, had one two-year-old child, and was expecting twins. She decided to move to a better place in the suburbs of Salzburg with her children.

She moved several times for different reasons, all related to a lack of tenant protection regulations. The first landlord asked her to leave because her dog had scratched the radiator. With the second landlord, she had an agreement to live in the outbuilding of his farm and help him with the apple

harvest; unfortunately, he passed away, and his heirs did not want her to stay. She had difficulties finding an apartment with her children because social counselling would prioritise renting to 4-5 adults rather than to a mother with four children. Registering for a subsidised apartment in Salzburg was not an option because she could not prove a three-year tenancy there. When she found an affordable apartment in an outbuilding of a farm, she was asked for a high deposit because the landlord argued that children could break a lot of things. To pay this deposit and the relocation costs, she had to sell her car.

She inherited money from her grandmother and could apply for a subsidised apartment close to Salzburg at a reasonable price with a long-term agreement. Now she still lives there, but the rent and operating costs have doubled because the operation has been outsourced to another company and the housing cooperative has changed. Nonetheless, it is still less expensive than a similar unsubsidized apartment in Salzburg, which would be unaffordable for a single mother with a job in nursing like her.

She reminded the participants that due to Covid-19 more people are at risk of homelessness. This is due to bankruptcies and separations that usually affect the weakest in society, i.e., single parents, young adults, and elderly people. She also made a plea to combat the housing speculation that is massively intensified by the power of banks in the real estate sector. In Astrid's words:

> ***"There needs to be legal barriers against speculation and a ban on banks making real estate brokerage. Likewise, vacant offices should be rededicated as apartments, apartments should be built above department stores and no more ground-level department stores should be approved. The landlords should pay the brokerage fees. Rental contracts should be extended to 6 years, because three years is too short".***
>
> *- Astrid Kirchsteiger (EAPN Austria)*

Katarina Ivanković-Knežević (Director of the Unit Social Rights and Inclusion in DG Employment) was very touched by the three contributors' stories of courage and resilience. Although the stories were very different, there was a common thread related to homelessness and the difficulty of accessing housing, one of the extreme manifestations of poverty and social exclusion.

While Europe is a prosperous region with developed social models, one out of four Europeans is still at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The root causes and the challenges for the individuals facing poverty and homelessness can be very different: from low income to high housing prices, to precarious households, family breakdowns, addiction, health problems, discrimination, and unprepared transitions from institutional care to independent living. As a society, we need to work on preventing homelessness by addressing the issues of accessibility and affordability of house tenancy and provide dedicated services to support people facing these challenges.

The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan **-** the **European Platform on Combating Homelessness** - is a commitment to reduce social inequality and promote social cohesion across the member states. The EU member states and institutions, along with civil society organisations, have agreed to work together so that no one has to sleep in the streets, live in a transitional shelter longer than necessary, or leave institutional accommodation without an offer of appropriate housing. In addition, the member states will prepare their strategies and action plans to work towards the eradication of homelessness, which is the common goal for 2030. The pandemic has created momentum for addressing structural challenges for the social protection systems in the EU. Next year, and following the Council's recommendations, a framework of principles and guidelines for minimum income schemes will be developed. The intention is to allow access to these schemes to anyone in need throughout their lifetime. Today, there is low accessibility to minimum income and discrepancies in the national systems' eligibility requirements and overall design.

To close the session, participants contributed to a word cloud in response to the question: **What is the drop of inspiration that you take from these stories?** The three most used words were: **courage, hope, and resilience**.

> ***In short, anyone in need should receive support and have access to a minimum income and no one should be homeless or discriminated against due to this condition.***

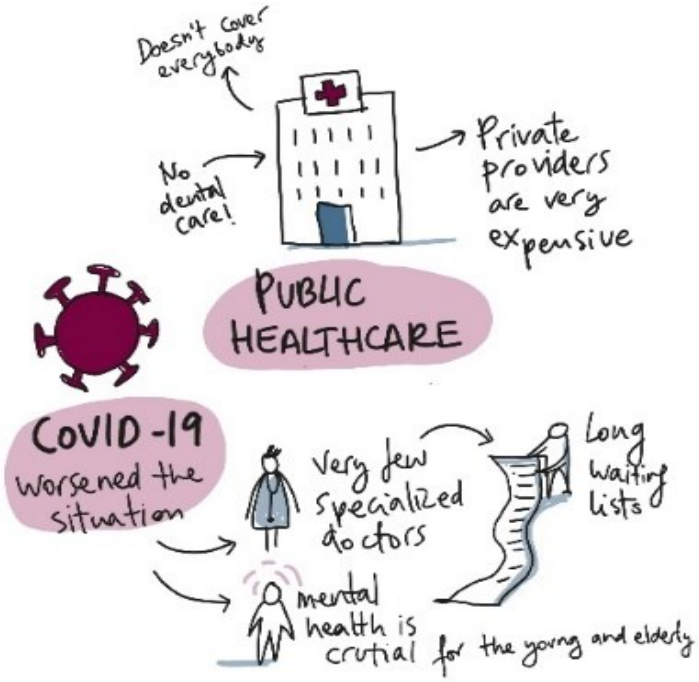
III. KEY CHALLENGES AND DEMANDS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

Introduction to the World Café session

During the second part of the day, all participants were invited to have open conversations in small groups. The aim of this session was to explore the commonalities and differences in the challenges that people experiencing poverty are facing across the EU, followed by asking the groups to develop key messages to be shared with policymakers and EU politicians. The session was structured using the World Café methodology that set up an informal (online) café setting for participants of different delegations to explore access to housing, minimum income, healthcare, and digital resources. The participative methodology allowed each delegation to contribute to discussions on two different topics.

In the first round of parallel workshops participants were invited to share their personal experiences of one specific topic, in the second round they could join workshops on a different topic and add more ideas to consider to the ones already discussed in the first round and finally, in the third round they went back to the first workshop they joined to develop key messages for the debate with politicians and policymakers on the next day.

A. Access to Healthcare



A.1. Main issues and challenges

Doctors give priority to Covid-19 patients over other diseases, so specialists have very long waiting lists. **Healthcare systems are understaffed and overwhelmed,** there are not enough public services, and this translates into not enough doctors, beds, medicines, or healthcare staff per capita. **In addition, people at risk of social exclusion** (women, migrants, ethnic minorities, the unemployed, the elderly, etc) **have a hard time accessing public health services.** All this was an issue before, but the Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation, especially for people experiencing poverty.

> ***"Specialized services (dental health, mental health, etc.) should be affordable and really accessible to people experiencing poverty and exclusion, and should not depend on income."***

Key Challenges:

Healthcare is a fundamental human right

- Public healthcare provision is under-funded and under-staffed in terms of infrastructure, equipment, and medicines.
- Vulnerable populations experiencing poverty find more barriers to accessing health services (no stable address, less access to digital devices or apps, etc).
- Health insurance doesn't cover everybody, and it does not cover all health services (dental or mental care and other essential health needs).
- Private healthcare providers are unaffordable for people experiencing poverty.

The Covid-19 pandemic worsened the pre-existing situation

- There are not enough specialised doctors, and the long waiting lists worsen people's health conditions.
- Covid-19 patients are prioritised and people with other health needs are left behind.
- Mental illness is increasing (especially among the young and the elderly) and the suicide rates of people experiencing poverty are higher.

Address legal loopholes

- Some people fall into the cracks of the system because they don't have legal documentation or access to digital devices, and so, cannot access healthcare.

A.2. How to improve the situation?

We need to act together with a rights-based approach to support the access to health for all, especially for those in need. To improve access to healthcare services for people experiencing poverty, we need to reduce their costs and promote public health systems. Health insurance should cover all basic health care but also specialised medical services. It should be affordable and accessible to people experiencing poverty regardless of income.

Poverty, nutrition, housing, and work conditions determine our physical and mental health. **Mental health is as important as physical health,** so we need to increase mental care services in the public health system to assist the increasing number of people that need them, especially during Covid times and particularly for the young and the elderly.

Key Demands:

A rights-based approach to health

- Make the public health system universal (cover all the people independently of their income, health conditions, or location).
- Support accessibility for people who can't access the health system without documentation, a fixed address, or disabilities.
- Cover the whole territory (decentralisation).

Funding for public healthcare

- Dedicate more funds to public health services to cover everyone's needs in terms of primary care and specialised treatments.

- Include specialised medical services: dental care, eye care, and mental care.
- Increase mental care services in the public health system to assist the increasing number of people that need them, especially during Covid times.

Prevention proposal

- Promote physical and mental health through programs of physical activities that increase personal confidence.
- Make these programmes accessible to everyone, especially to vulnerable and excluded people.
- Develop programs to support healthcare accessibility (e.g., support with documentation, alternative to home address, alternatives to digitalisation of medical services).

B. Access to Minimum Income

B.1. Main issues and challenges

The common denominator of poverty in the EU is that minimum income is not high enough to enable people to live with dignity. Minimum income is a measure of what different types of households require to reach a socially acceptable living standard. It usually takes into consideration the cost of food, housing, health, and other essential services. These essential living costs are rising rapidly, and minimum income schemes have not been increased to keep up with these changes.

The variety of situations of vulnerability among groups such as single parents, people with disabilities, immigrants, asylum seekers, etc. points to a great need for an individual approach. Many people experiencing poverty are on disability pensions, but it has become so low that they end up in poverty. **Minimum income is a benefit that deals with stigma and social judgement.** People benefiting from minimum income are often discriminated against and therefore are afraid to share their personal experiences to avoid being judged and excluded.

"Minimum income is too low. Living costs are a lot higher - rent, food, eletricity, water. It's impossible to survive."

Key Challenges:

The level of minimum income is too low

- Minimum income is not high enough to enable people to live with dignity and be part of society.
- Adequacy based on individual needs.

Difficult access to minimum income schemes

- Minimum income should be rights-based.
- Bureaucracy is an obstacle, worsened by territorial discrepancies.
- The digitalisation of the applications prevents some people from accessing them (without a computer, access to the Internet or information on how to apply).

Discrimination

- Discrimination against people benefiting from minimum income and minimum wage.
- The stigmatisation of people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

B.2. How to improve the situation

We need to increase minimum income and minimum wage to ensure that people live in dignity. This means living in such a way that all basic needs are covered, and people can access services for social inclusion. Minimum income adequacy can be measured by a ***"consumption basket"*** taking into account the different local circumstances. It was mentioned that taxation levels should also support minimum income.

An EU Recommendation is not strong enough and a directive is needed. We need more participation of people experiencing poverty and their organisations in decision-making processes and in the design of action plans to ensure there is a real impact on the lives of people.

Key Demands:

Increase Minimum Wage

- Set the minimum income at an adequate level that allows access to basic services and those improving quality of life (culture, leisure, etc.).

Eradicate poverty

- Provide access to minimum income to groups at risk of social exclusion such as youth, the elderly, people with disabilities, women, single parents, etc.
- Give free access to all basic services: education, health, etc.
- Promote access to employment with a personalised support system.

Build a strong movement at the EU level

- Design minimum income schemes and define their level of adequacy with the genuine participation of people experiencing poverty and their organisations.

C. Access to Housing

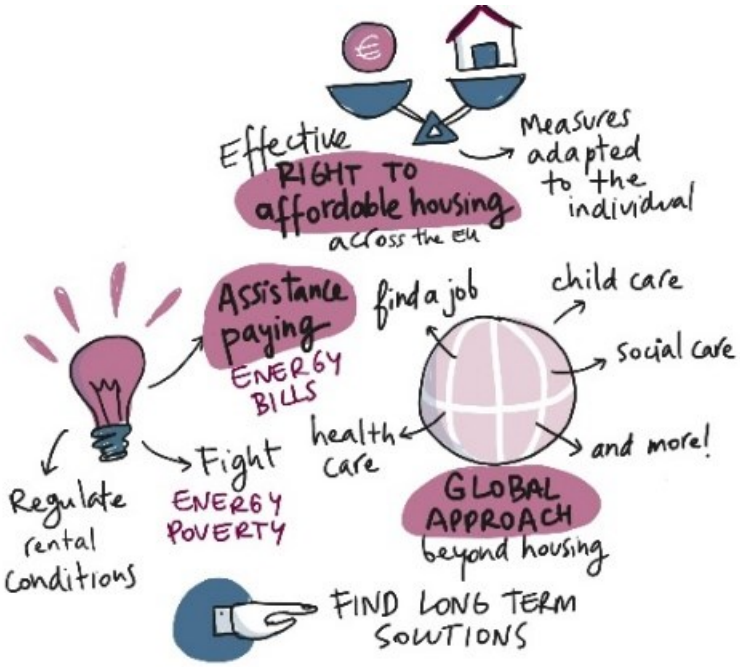
C.1. Main issues and challenges

It is a human right to access adequate, quality, and affordable housing in line with the costs of living. The unaffordable prices of housing and the inadequacy of minimum income are two of the main causes of poverty.

Access to housing is a complex issue interconnected with access to other public services such as employment, education, and health. Climate change is also affecting the problem of housing: new housing sustainable standards are demanded but people are worried this will push social housing further down the priorities list, which will keep restricting the supply of affordable houses.

> ***"Housing (paying rent) makes people poor. I have to choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table."***

There are **high levels of discrimination with regards to access to housing for the most vulnerable groups** such as the unemployed, single parent families, women, refugees, migrants, the elderly, young adults, students, people with disabilities… **Rural areas and small cities** offer more affordable prices and good quality houses, but unemployment levels are high and there is limited access to basic services.



Key Challenges:

Unaffordable cost of living

- Lack of affordability of house prices.
- Rising prices of energy and basic services.
- Absent or insufficient minimum income.

Complexity and interconnected challenges

- Dependence of access to other public services (employment, education, and health services) on access to housing.
- Inability to pay for housing with insufficient minimum income.
- Climate change and the green wave is also increasing the need for quality housing.

Poor regulation of rental conditions

- High cost of rental deposits.
- Tenancy requirements are out of reach for many people.
- Poor protection measures for tenants.

- Long waiting lists to access social housing.
- Bureaucracy and digitalisation make it even harder to allocate vacant housing to those in need.

Discrimination

- Social discrimination based on race, gender, income, employment, disability, student status, etc.

C.2. How to improve the situation

Access to housing is a fundamental right. We need to tackle homelessness, and fight energy poverty, by providing quality houses, making energy bills affordable, and implementing social measures across Europe. **Regulation of housing prices is key to overcoming the problem of housing affordability by making people spend a lower proportion of their income on housing**. Improving the supply of quality homes, suitable to the living standard, will also support the optimisation of energy and lower the bills.

We need to find solutions and make agreements with the banks regarding the high number of empty houses. Indeed, a large proportion of the supply of houses is sold to investors instead of being dedicated to social housing. We need to make sure houses go to the people who need them.

It is important that EU institutions listen and learn from the experience of migrant and vulnerable groups. It's so easy to become homeless, and it's very difficult to come back. We should invest in prevention of homelessness with a global approach. We need to design a social system beyond housing that helps citizens access employment, social care, health care, mental care, childcare, etc.

Key Demands:

Prevention of homelessness

- Provide a safety net of social services and social welfare.
- Help people keep their homes through long-term and adapted housing solutions.

Affordable housing solutions

- Dedicate more EU funds to housing support and rent assistance.
- Offer enough social housing. People with a low income have the right to housing.
- Fund actions to fight energy poverty by implementing an action plan that supports citizens.
- Ensure that the social climate fund will serve those in need.

Accessible housing solutions

- Regulate the terms of tenancy contracts.
- Monitor and regulate private market prices.
- Minimise the bureaucracy and support access to digital applications.

Quality housing solutions

- Provide houses that are well insulated to combat energy poverty and be sustainable.
- Provide adequate house/room sizes to tenants.
- Provide houses in safe neighbourhoods near basic services.

New global and local approach

- Adopt a global approach, a social system that is available beyond housing (finding a job, social care, health care, childcare, etc.).
- Invest in decentralisation to support the development of rural areas.

D. Access to digital resources

D.1. Main issues and challenges

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the rate of digitalisation and exacerbated inequalities and the risk of social exclusion. **The scarcity of quality digital resources for people experiencing poverty is causing difficulties in other areas** such as access to health care via online appointments, the ability to make payments for essential goods when digital services are replacing money (e.g., public transport), and many more.

Digital devices and the Covid pandemic have also reduced the frequency of our face-to-face daily interactions. This new way of living has negatively impacted our mental and physical health, increased the levels of loneliness, and has decreased the amount of daily physical activity.

Key Challenges:

Need for human contact

- Many times, digital solutions have replaced human interaction and face-to-face service provision instead of complementing them.
- The amount of physical activity people undertake in everyday life has decreased.
- Loneliness is one of the main causes of physical and mental health problems.
- Language barriers make it complicated for different vulnerable groups (illiterate, people with lower levels of education, migrants, etc.) to engage with bureaucratic or everyday procedures if they don't have access to face-to-face interactions.

Risk of digital exclusion

- Digitalisation is becoming an obligation, excluding those who are not able or not willing to access and use digital services.
- The barriers to access to digital services due to a lack of quality digital devices or Internet connections increase exclusion and inequality.
- There is a growing need for digital devices to access all services (education, healthcare, etc).
- The generational gap is also clear, with parents less able to use digital devices or applications and needing to rely on their children.

D.2. How to improve the situation

Since digitalisation is playing such a key role in our society, we need to ensure that people at risk of social exclusion have affordable access to quality digital devices and services. We need to increase digital skills by training citizens in how to use the digital space. This includes training in schools for elderly people, for people with disabilities, and for people with no education.

We need to be aware of **the importance of face-to-face human connections for our wellbeing**. Therefore, we need to promote onsite social connections and provide support as a way to include those who don't participate in the digital space.

Key Demands:

Connection for all

- Support access to quality devices, digital equipment, and quality internet connections for citizens with low resources.
- Ensure good Web connectivity and equipment that can support digital meetings and activities.
- Provide a public support system for people who will never be able to participate in the digital space.

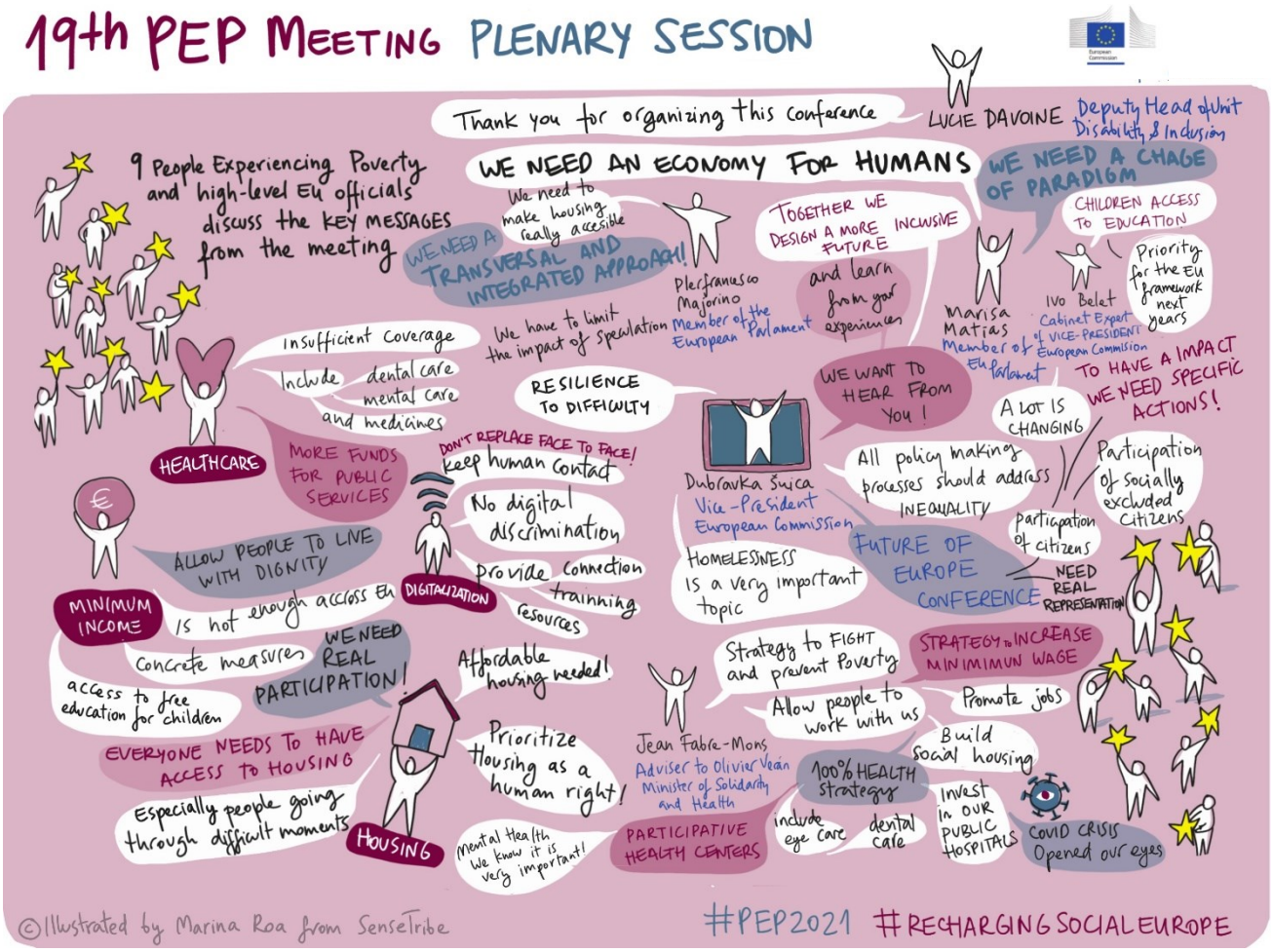
Digital capacity building

- Train people in digital skills, particularly the young and the elderly, people with disabilities, and people with little to no education.
- Build awareness of cybersecurity and critical thinking to help people detect and avoid misinformation.

Digital hygiene

- Develop laws that regulate cybersecurity.

IV. CLOSING PLENARY: RESPONSE FROM POLICYMAKERS AND NEXT STEPS



The closing plenary session brought together people experiencing poverty and high-level EU officials to discuss the key reflections from the meeting. After the sharing of the main highlights from the different delegations, politicians and policymakers responded and shared their views and action plans for making progress towards tackling poverty.

Pierfrancesco Majorino (Member of the European Parliament, Socialists & Democrats Group) highlighted the **need for a universal approach** that links all the sides and needs. He also mentioned the importance of the next generation of EU funds and capacity-building funds. Finally, he brought up **the key role the parliament plays in asking the question of how these funds are spent to tackle poverty**, social exclusion and allow PEP to participate in their decisions.

Dubravka Šuica (Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Democracy and Demography) emphasised that citizen participation at all levels of policy making is part of our response to making our democracy more responsive and more resilient. The conference has started the largest deliberative democracy process at the EU level, and this will strengthen

representative democracy. These processes can help EU citizens feed their views into policy making and decision making and help to reduce inequalities. *"**It is vital to listen to and make sense of citizens' experiences to design appropriate action plans to tackle the main challenges of PEP"***

Ivo Belet (Cabinet expert of the Vice-President of the EC for Democracy and Demography) said that bringing to the conference people from all social backgrounds who usually are not involved in policymaking is new in the EU. To keep involving civil society and PEP in the Future of Europe, access to the Internet must be ensured. He spoke about the **importance of quality and affordable health care, especially mental health, and about the access to education for children from vulnerable families**, which will be considered in next year's framework of the Children's Rights Strategy. Finally, he mentioned that many of the messages from the conference can be addressed through the European Social Fund (ESF), the National Recovery and Resilience Plans and the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD), which will be integrated into the upcoming multiannual framework in the European Social Plus, **requiring member states to invest at least 3% of the EU social fund resources to support those in need**.

Jean Fabre-Mons, adviser to **Olivier Véran** (Minister of Solidarity and Health in France), explained that his country has made a historical investment in the creation of social housing and in the access to healthcare and social benefits, **promoting a "*100% health strategy*" that includes everything from dental to eye and mental health.** He also mentioned that they have implemented '*participative health centres*' in low-income neighbourhoods that will offer mediation and help to the people and be in permanent dialogue with citizens to integrate everyone into the system.

Sérgio Aires, representing **Marisa Matias** (Member of the European Parliament, the Left group GUE/NGL), reinforced the need for a transverse and integrated approach from the social pillar. Although this has been said for many years, little has been done and that is the reason why these demands should be channelled through the Parliament. **He advocated for a shift in the paradigm we are currently living in both in the European Union and in the world.** *"**What we need is an economy made for humans and for the planet which is not exactly what we are doing. We are changing but changes are very slow and not enough for all the needs we have".***

Lucie Davoine underlined that this conference is an important part of a continuous dialogue with the most vulnerable citizens whose **voices are not always heard which feeds into policy making**. Lucie mentioned that her takeaway from participants' contributions is several proposals on the importance of making minimum income high enough to enable people to live with dignity and be part of society, on quality housing, or on how to make healthcare more accessible and universal, and many more.

Fintan Farrell (an independent expert on Social Inclusion) closed the meeting highlighting those incremental changes are not enough and that we need a change of paradigm. PEP meetings are an ongoing process and conversations to build a more social and sustainable Europe. In his own words, ***'Failure is not an option, we must continue because an injury to one person is an injury to all".***

The EAPN Delegations pointed out that if they do not see real solutions to what they are bringing to the conference, instead of motivating them to continue this will have the complete opposite effect.

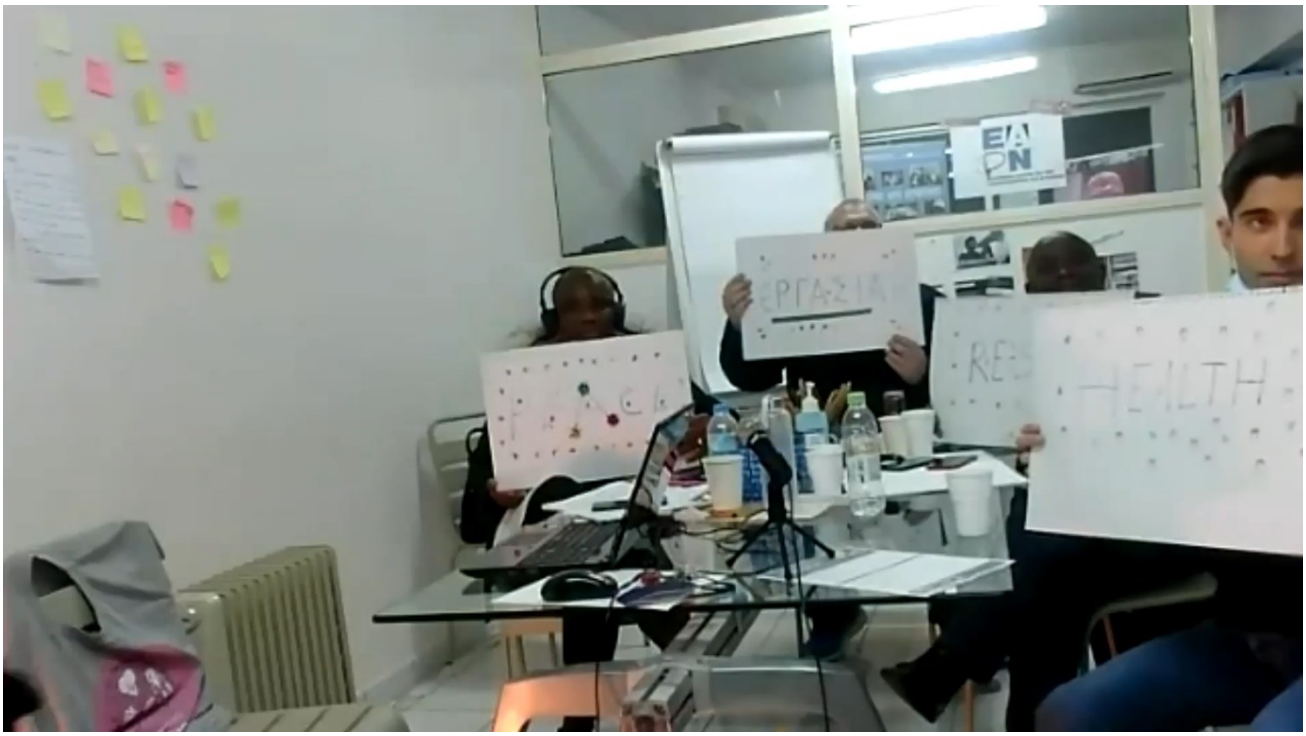
V. VISIBILITY ACTIONS

This year, several national delegations contributed with their visibility actions and key messages:

EAPN Netherlands: The Many Faces of Poverty

EAPN Romania: Free Education, Minimum Income for All

EAPN Greece: This Year We Ask Santa for "Work", "Peace", "Wealth" and "Health"



EAPN Portugal: Build a More Social Europe

VII. THANK YOU

Thank you to all participants, people experiencing poverty, delegations, national coordinators, and guests, your work is at the heart of this meeting. Please do not give up. Thank you to the facilitators, note takers for documenting this meeting, and volunteer interpreters. Thanks to the European Commission, and your commitment to this process. Thank you to Fintan Farrell for hosting this meeting. Thank you to the Destree team for the technical backup, and to the EAPN team who worked incredibly hard to deliver the best meeting possible. Thank you to Rebecca Lee for the communication work and Magda Tancau for the amazing coordination. Thanks to Laura Grassi from SenseTribe for the participatory event design, and to Marina Roa for the harvesting and graphic facilitation.

WE HOPE NEXT TIME WE CAN MEET FACE TO FACE!

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See EAPN publications and activities on www.eapn.eu

EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

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