

Poverty Watch

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Cover photo: "No food, no development". Photograph included in the publication "Olha(res) Real(ais) e Com Sentido" (Real and Meaningful Eyes) by the National Council of Citizens of EAPN Portugal

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1. Introduction

EAPN Portugal's mission is to contribute to building a more just and solidary society, in which everyone is co-responsible for guaranteeing citizens' access to a dignified life, based on respect for Human Rights and the full exercise of informed, participatory and inclusive citizenship. The fight against poverty and the promotion of a dignified life for everyone is, without doubt, one of the main concerns of the Organisation, which celebrates 31 years of existence this year. The development of thematic documents, such as Poverty Watch, is part of EAPN's work to produce knowledge and deepen the understanding of poverty issues while giving a voice to those who live in this situation.

After two years of the pandemic, there is an increase in the at-risk-of-poverty rate at the national level. A clear sign that the pandemic has worsened the social and economic situation of the Portuguese. Added to this scenario is a political crisis that led to new legislative elections in January and a war in Europe that began in February that led to a massive displacement of refugees. To the difficulties already experienced, others have been added, such as the increase in food, fuel and energy prices. Poverty Watch 2022 aims to report on these new challenges facing the country and its citizens, particularly the most vulnerable.

Response mechanisms are presented to challenges, such as the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) with an allocation of 13.9 billion euros in grants and 2.7 billion euros in loans and the next financial framework with an allocation of 23.8 billion euros. Instruments that are intended to support the achievement of political agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Pillar of Social Rights that are central to strengthening the social cohesion of Member States.

Like the previous Poverty Watch, EAPN Portugal reflected with the representatives of the Local Citizens' Councils¹ on their assessment of the current national situation, the challenges that exist for people experiencing poverty and, in particular, how rising energy and food prices impact on the most vulnerable people. We also intend to understand whether they consider that the national government has been concerned with promoting measures to mitigate the impact of these increases on the most vulnerable people, what remains to be done, especially taking into account the challenges that the war in Ukraine has brought for the most vulnerable people. What concerns them most at the moment and what recommendations would they like to propose.

¹ Three meetings were held in July specifically to prepare the Poverty Watch (two national ones and one with the CLC of Guarda). However, the themes addressed here have been regularly discussed in other moments and meetings in which members of the local councils take part.

2. Poverty and social exclusion situation in Portugal

Key data on poverty at national level

The pandemic crisis had considerable impacts on people's lives, not only because it exacerbated some of the already existing problems, often making them more visible, but also because it brought new ones. The watchwords were, and still are, those of *resilience* and *recovery*. However, since February this year, with the start of the Ukraine-Russia war, the word and the feeling of *uncertainty* about the future has shaken the path of recovery.

The most recent data from Poverty in Portugal² show an increase in the at-risk-of-poverty rate, in 2020, to 18.4% (1,893 thousand), marking a change in the downward trend of this rate. The risk of poverty affects different population groups in different ways, and similarly to the overall at-risk-of-poverty rate, there was a worsening trend in the situation in almost all groups, as can be seen in the following grid:

Table 1: At-risk-of-poverty rate in Portugal (%) according to selected population groups

Population groups	At-risk-of-poverty rate %	
	2019	2020
Children	19.1	20.4
Adults	14.9	17.2
Elderly Population	17.5	20.1
Women	16.7	19.2
Older women	19.5	22.5
Single parent Families	25.5	30.2
Families with two adults (at least one elderly person) and no children	16.4	19.9
Other households with children	17.6	26.3
Unemployed	40.7	46.5
Employees	9.6	11.2
Retired	15.7	18.0

Source: INE; Income and Living Conditions 2021

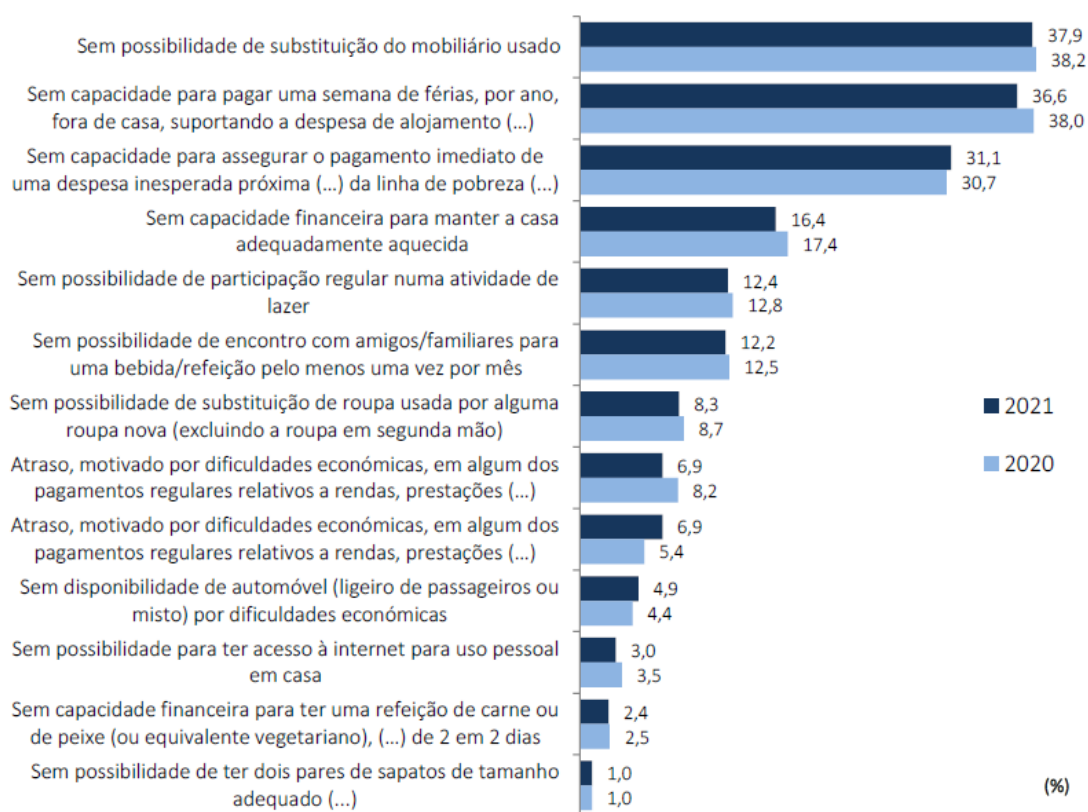
Portugal is characterised by strong regional asymmetries which are reflected in the levels of poverty throughout the territory. The autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira continue to have the

² INE, Income and Living Conditions 2021, INE Highlight. Available at: https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_destaquas&DESTAQUESdest_boui=473574196&DESTAQUESmodo=2

highest at-risk-of-poverty rates, 24.2% and 21.9% respectively. It is followed by the Algarve (21.6%) and the North of the country (21.1%). However, in an analysis of the risk of poverty calculated on the basis of the regional poverty lines it is "possible to distinguish three groups: the regions north of the Tagus, with values around 19%, the region of Algarve and the autonomous regions, with values around 18% and the region of Alentejo with 17%".

The monitoring indicator of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion defined under the Europe 2020 Strategy underwent changes taking into account the new agenda for Europe until 2030³ and the established target of reducing poverty by at least 15 million people (5 million children). In Portugal, in 2021, the at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rate rose to 22.4% (it was 20% in the previous year). At the same time, the proportion of the population under 65 living in households with very low per capita labour intensity was 5.2% in 2020. In severe material and social deprivation was 6.0% of the population (2021). The following image shows detailed information regarding each of the items of material and social deprivation and the evolution trend between 2020 and 2021.

Figure 1: Items of material and social deprivation, Portugal, 2021



Fonte: INE, Inquérito às Condições de Vida e Rendimento 2020-2021.

It should also be noted that in Portugal the poverty intensity rate has increased to 27.1% in 2020 (it was 24.4% in 2019) and the country continues to be among those with the highest level of persistent

³ The indicator of population at risk of poverty or social exclusion within the framework of Europe 2030 corresponds to individuals at risk of poverty either living in households with very low per capita labour intensity (according to Europe 2030 definition) or experiencing severe material and social deprivation. Source: www.ine.pt

poverty (9.8% in 2020), i.e., we have a significant percentage of people who remain in this situation of vulnerability for a long period of time.

Rising prices and the war in Ukraine

The recent Spring 2022 Eurobarometer report⁴ focuses on three aspects: the war in Ukraine and the economic impact on citizens; citizens' attitudes towards the EU and the importance of membership, political priorities and the values on which the European Parliament (EP) should focus; and finally, citizens' propensity to vote two years before the European Elections 2024.

From a European perspective, there are changes in what citizens want the European Parliament's political priorities to be: fight against poverty in first place (38%); health, in second place (35%) and, in third place, fight against climate change (31%). The defence of Democracy is central, followed by freedom of expression and the protection of human rights. There is also an increase in citizens' positive image vis-à-vis the EU and EP and a further rise in upholding EU membership. People are already experiencing a reduction in their living conditions and are not prepared for price increases: food prices (59%) and energy prices (58%). Finally, 6 out of 10 of the citizens who answered the survey nevertheless consider that it is more important to maintain and uphold freedom and democracy (uphold European values) than to maintain prices and the cost of living.

In Portugal, it is interesting to note that although it is also important to maintain European values, the Portuguese consider that *maintaining prices and the cost of living* should be a priority⁵. With regard to the values that should be upheld, the Portuguese consider first and foremost the protection of human rights; followed by solidarity between member states and between their regions and the fight against discrimination and for the protection of minorities, on the same level as solidarity between the EU and poor countries in the world.

Regarding the war, 56% of the nationals who responded to the survey said that they *are not confident* that their lives will not change as a result of the war. Regarding the consequences, 74% of respondents said they were *not prepared to face a rise in energy prices, and a rise in food prices*. A percentage above the EU average. The same is true when 57% of citizens (40% for the EU) report that *the consequences of the war in Ukraine have already reduced their standard of living and expect this to continue over the next year*. The fact that the war has affected people's living standards is a reality for almost all professional categories, but with great relevance (100%) for *domestic workers, self-employed (98%), managers (97%) and unemployed (95%)*. The difficulty to pay the bills is a reality *most of the time* for 96% of the respondents.

The fact that national citizens consider that it should be a priority to *maintain prices and the cost of living* reflects, to a large extent, the difficulties they already face with the continuous rises in goods.

⁴ European Parliament Special Eurobarometer Spring 2022, Factsheet Portugal; *Rallying around the European Flag. Democracy as anchor point in times of crisis*, Eurobarometer Executive Summary. European Parliament, Spring 2022. Documents available at: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2792>

⁵ Respondents had to position themselves on a scale where "1" "means that upholding our common European values, such as freedom and democracy, should be a priority, even if this affects prices and the cost of living" and "6" means that "maintaining prices and the cost of living should be a priority, even if this affects upholding our common European values". The majority of national citizens positioned themselves at 4-6.

According to the latest official data from Eurostat⁶ inflation in the euro area rose to 8.6% in June 2022. In the same month, Portugal reached 9% (in June 2021 it was -0.6) and the European Union 9.6%. According to the same source, the biggest contribution to inflation in the euro area came from energy (+4.19 percentage points), food, alcohol and tobacco (+1.88 pp), services (+1.42 pp) and non-energy industrial goods (+1.15 pp). The INE estimate⁷ released at the end of July indicated a further rise in inflation to 9.1%. The greatest pressure continues to be on energy products (31.2%) and unprocessed food (13.2%).

Energy has a considerable impact on citizens' well-being. According to the European Housing Exclusion Index 2022⁸, 17.5% of the total national population have financial difficulties in maintaining an adequate temperature in their houses. This percentage skyrockets in the case of the poorest households, with 33.8% of these households unable to maintain an adequate temperature in their houses. Portugal ranks 4th among all European countries, only being surpassed by Bulgaria (49.2%), Cyprus (41.6%) and Greece (39.2%). In fact, over the last few months there has been a rise in household expenditure, which has put even more pressure on households that were already facing significant costs in key areas of life, such as housing.

According to the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP)⁹, between January and June 2022, in Portugal, the total HICP *growth rate* increased from 3.4 to 9.0. A more detailed analysis shows that the growth rate for *food and non-alcoholic beverages* rose from 3.7 to 13.2; for *food* alone, it rose from 3.3 to 11.7; for *housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels*, it rose from 4.5 to 13.5; *transport* from 6.1 to 14.1 and *energy* from 12.3 to 31.9.

According to INE¹⁰, the Consumer Confidence Indicator fell sharply in March 2022, reflecting the context of the war which began on February 24th. This decrease was due to negative expectations regarding the future evolution of the country's economic situation and the financial situation of the household. It should also be noted that "the balance of prospects regarding the future evolution of prices registered in March the biggest increase of the series which began in September 1997, largely exceeding the previous maximum value".

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/14644638/2-19072022-AP-EN.pdf/fff35147-c9b3-a915-7bf0-b09202bbd130?t=1658145352807>

⁷ INE, *Consumer price index. Quick Estimate July 2022*, INE Highlight, July 29, 2022. Available at: https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_destaques&DESTAQUESdest_boui=540173161&DESTAQUESmodo=2

⁸ FEANTSA and Abbé Pierre Foundation, *The 7th overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2022*, June 30, 2022.

⁹ Monthly data: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EI_CPHI_M_custom_3111044/default/table?lang=en
Code: EI_CPHI_M, updated on 07/19/2022

The Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) provides comparable measures of inflation for the countries and groups of countries for which it is produced. It is an economic indicator that measures the evolution over time of the prices of consumer goods and services purchased by households. In other words, it is a set of consumer price indices (CPIs) calculated according to a harmonised approach and a set of definitions as set down in Regulations and Recommendations (see Eurostat)

¹⁰ INE, *Business and Consumer Surveys*, INE Highlight, March 30, 2022.

Housing is still a challenge

According to the latest report on housing exclusion in Europe¹¹, in Portugal, 14.3% of poor households live in overcrowded conditions compared to 9.0% of the total population. 7.2% of poor households experience severe housing deprivation compared to 3.9% of the total population. 36.4% of poor households live in inadequate conditions compared to 25.2% of the population. In this case, Portugal ranks 3rd among all the Member States. The same is true for poor children (under 18 years of age) living in inadequate housing (38.6% in 2020), despite a decrease since 2019 in the order of - 5%.

Housing is one of the components of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (C2), with a budget allocation of 2733 M€ with which it is intended to support 26,000 households with decent housing (Support Program for Access to Housing) and allocate 6,800 houses to families through the provision of affordable housing (Affordable Public Housing Park), among other investments/impacts.

Employment and unemployment

The unemployment rate¹² has been rising slightly and in June was 6.1%. Women remain one of the most vulnerable groups to unemployment (6.3%) when compared to men (5.9%). The youth unemployment rate rose by 0.8 percentage points between May (18.5%) and June (19.3%), reflecting one of the major national problems.

In a more detailed analysis, the Statistical Bulletin of the GEP of July 2022¹³ indicated that in the "1st quarter of 2022, the number of unemployed persons was 308.4 thousand, 21.3 % of which were young people aged 16-24 (20.5 % in the 1st quarter of 2021). In the Alentejo region, young people accounted for 30.9 % of total unemployment, which is the highest figure in the country, with the lowest figure in the Algarve region (12.9 %)".

The employment rate in June was 63.4%, slightly lower than the previous month (63.6%) (INE data). This decrease in the employed population and increase in the unemployed population explains the estimated decrease in the active population in this same period (-13.7 thousand people when compared with the month of May).

Social protection

Social protection has a significant impact on reducing the incidence of poverty in Portugal. The latest data show that transfers related to sickness and disability, family, unemployment and social inclusion had a lower weight in the reduction of poverty (reflecting problems in the adequacy of social

¹¹ FEANTSA and Abbé Pierre Foundation, The 7th overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2022, June 30, 2022, pp. 89-113. Chapter 4: European Index of Housing Exclusion 2022: https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/reports/2022/Overview_Chapter_4.pdf

¹² INE, *Monthly estimates of employment and unemployment, June 2022*, INE Highlight of July 29, 2022. Available at: https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_destaquas&DESTAQUESdest_boui=540173564&DESTAQUESmodo=2

¹³ GEP, *Statistical Bulletin*, July 2022. Available at: <http://www.gep.mtsss.gov.pt/documents/10182/10925/bejul2022.pdf/129afe49-9a6e-4215-a087-7bcb3c3a026>

transfers), however, with social transfers, the at-risk-of-poverty rate decreases from 23% to 18.4%. Without pensions and social transfers, the poverty rate would reach 43.5% at the national level.

From the point of view of support granted in situations of great economic fragility, we highlight in the following tables some information regarding the Social Integration Income (RSI), the Solidarity Supplement for the Elderly (CSI) and the Social Inclusion Benefit (PSI):

Table 2: Families and beneficiaries with RSI processing (no.) and average values (€)

	2019	2020	2021	June 2022
Families with RSI processing (no.)	127 701	123 662	127 105	98 953
Beneficiaries with RSI processing (no.)	267 393	257 968	261 992	206 618
Average value per family (€)	259.43	261.96	260.96	261.35
Average value per beneficiary (€)	116.01	118.13	119.39	121.37

Source: Social Security

In a more detailed analysis, it should be noted that, in June 2022, the average household size is 2.2 elements. From the point of view of the beneficiaries, singular beneficiaries (1 person) continue to prevail (50,147), followed by households with 3 persons (35,852). The gender differences are not very pronounced, but in June 2022, 53.2% were women benefiting from the RSI and 46.7% were men. More than 67,000 of the RSI beneficiaries in June were children (32.7%).

Table 3: Beneficiaries of the Social Supplement for the Elderly (no.) and average value (€)

Beneficiaries (no.)	2019	2020	2021
		176 272	171 768
June 2022			
Beneficiaries (no.)	153 501		
Average value (€)	109.64		

Source: Social Security

It should be noted that a large number of the beneficiaries of the Social Supplement for the Elderly (79,917) are in the 0 to €100 month bracket, i.e., they earn less than the average. There are 54,683 beneficiaries in the next bracket, i.e., from €101 to €200 per month.

A significant percentage (70.3%) of the beneficiaries are female and, in terms of age group, the majority are aged 75-79.

Table 4: Beneficiaries of the Social Inclusion Benefit (no.) and average value (€)

Beneficiaries (no.)	2019	2020	2021
		107 576	114 798
June 2022			
Beneficiaries (no.)	125 025		
Average value (€)	308.98		

Source: Social Security

The social inclusion benefit is a benefit made up by 3 elements: the basic component, the supplement and the top-up¹⁴. The supplement aims to fight poverty for people with disabilities. Regarding the supplement, it should be noted that, in June 2022, 24,857 people were entitled to this supplement and the average value of the benefit was €249.68. Most of the beneficiaries had a disability between 60% and 80% (16,644) and there is hardly any difference concerning gender (50.38% male and 49.62% female beneficiaries). A significant number of beneficiaries are aged 50-59.

¹⁴ More information at www.seg-social.pt

3. Two years of pandemic and new challenges in Portugal

On March 2, 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 appeared in Portugal and on March 18, the Government declared the first state of emergency. The pandemic brought new challenges to entities in general and people in particular. However, the pandemic managed to bring out and give more visibility to problems already existing in Portuguese society, namely among population groups already living in poverty and social exclusion. After more than two years of the pandemic, and with more than 80% of the Portuguese population vaccinated, it seems that the pandemic itself is a matter of the past, but its effects are not.

Between March and June, EAPN Portugal organized a series of thematic seminars as part of the Dialogues on Poverty Congress¹⁵, where it was possible to discuss some of the challenges that Portugal faces in fighting poverty in general, at work, in health and in terms of economic development. From reflection, the pandemic clearly emerged as a challenge that we still have to overcome and that has aggravated other structural challenges at national level and to which an effective answer has not yet been given.

"The country is in a shambles" was one of the answers that one of the members of the National Council of Citizens¹⁶ gave to the question about the assessment of the current situation after two years of the pandemic. The fact that a war started in Europe in February of this year and that its effects are already being felt has contributed to this appreciation. However, there are very real concerns about the pandemic. Some of the concerns raised, in our view, still need to be studied in order to understand their real national dimension and their long-term effects.

The effects of COVID-19 on **health** are one of those problems, together with the existing problems in the National Health System: *"Coverage by GPs is still a problem concerning health services... I was left with some sequels as a result of COVID... it is necessary to follow up at this level [post COVID] in order to avoid serious health problems in the future"*. The European Commission's report for Portugal¹⁷ stated: "The pandemic of COVID-19 has evidenced the underlying structural problems of Portugal's health system" and highlights the recovery and resilience plan as an opportunity "to increase the response capacity of the National Health System in the domains of primary, mental and long-term care, together with efficiency-oriented measures aimed at improving governance, cost-effectiveness, access and public hospital services' quality".

Recently, the Government signed an agreement with the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities for skills decentralisation in health and education domain. According to the Transparency Portal,¹⁸ with skills decentralization in health domain, "the municipality is responsible for the operational and financial management of the health centres available to the population in its geographical area, namely maintenance, conservation and management of equipment and logistical support services, as well as management of the workers inserted in the career of operational

¹⁵ The conclusions of the Congress will be published soon.

¹⁶ The testimonies presented in this chapter are the result of reflection work carried out with representatives of EAPN Portugal's local citizens' councils.

¹⁷ European Commission, *Portugal 2022 Report*, Brussels, 23.5.2022. Available: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2022-european-semester-country-report-portugal_pt.pdf

¹⁸ <https://transparencia.gov.pt/pt/>

assistant". Major changes that can meet the challenges of the health sector and that also may give an answer to the effects of the pandemic on the referred sector are expected, namely being able to fill gaps such as the *"medical follow-up that has not been done, the delays in appointments that have not yet been made up and the postponed and still delayed surgeries and treatments"*. Its impact is yet to be measured.

Another challenge that characterises the current situation has to do with **intolerance**: *"we are completely intolerant towards each other". "Everybody is in burnout. Everybody is tired... we're looking a lot more inside ourselves and we're a lot more intolerant"*. This testimony allows us to highlight the importance of **mental health** and how it may have been affected by the pandemic. In the 2nd survey conducted by EAPN Portugal¹⁹ in 2021 on the impact of the pandemic on organisations (public and non-governmental), this problem was already identified concerning human resources management: professionals' burnout emerges as the most consensual impact in the area of human resources management, with about 55% of organisations stating an extremely high impact (29%) or very high impact (26%). Organisations that work with the elderly, disabled adults and people with mental or psychiatric illnesses are the ones that most place the impact at the most extreme level. Burnout, physical and psychological fatigue, exhaustion, saturation, stress, fear, the need for mental health management or emotional management of employees, psychological/emotional wear and tear were the expressions used by respondents when identifying the challenges faced by organisations in the area of human resources management.

There is a vivid concern that the intolerance currently experienced impacts the way people are looked at (*"society's indifference towards the difficulties of vulnerable groups"*), namely the most vulnerable people and the way social intervention is carried out: *"I went into depression. Why? The coexistence... we were kept apart, people couldn't give a hug, give a kiss, we couldn't play... people were in a cage. And, how do you say?! When you open the cage, the lion attacks his enemy"*.

It seems that relational skills have been lost, but in the opinion of some members we are facing a new challenge which is about **values** (and the impact of technologies on the loss of values): *"Values are completely changed"*. Lockdown was also that: *"people being at home clinging to tablets and cell phones. Values are changed: people don't talk, people don't socialise, people are not willing to listen to the other. I see entire tables of people and they are all clinging to their cell phones"*. The pandemic accelerated processes already underway. **Digitalisation** was one of them. On one hand, there is this feeling that people are *"stuck"* on technologies and this is also a question of mental health and the search for happiness: *"each one will have to look... look inside and think, am I happy? People have to find ways to be happier... put their cell phone on the cradle... go for a walk..."*

On the other hand, the use of technologies is already part of people's daily lives and is bringing new problems to the most vulnerable people and to those who, even if they are not in a vulnerable situation from an economic point of view, have few, if any, digital skills: *"we have to escape from the prison of technologies, but then we have to find some solutions as a society. But this is a challenge for people experiencing poverty because now everything is computerised"*. The challenges of

¹⁹ EAPN Portugal, *Fighting poverty and social exclusion in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results of the 2nd survey of organizations*, December 2021. Available at: <https://www.eapn.pt/documento/747/o-combate-a-pobreza-e-exclusao-social-no-contexto-da-pandemia-por-covid-19-resultados-do-2o-inquerito-as-organizacoes>

digitalisation for the most vulnerable people have already been listed in Poverty Watch 2021²⁰ and are highlighted again showing the difficulty people have in accessing services through digital means. There is also concern that greater digitalisation of services does not necessarily mean less bureaucracy. Services, even online, remain bureaucratic. One of the solutions pointed out is the need to continue to have *face-to-face answers* for those who have no way of accessing online and to *streamline local power structures - Parish Councils* – to support people in online access to services. The role of the Parish Councils was highlighted as positive but it was also mentioned that they do not always have permanent human resources in their structure and/or lack the knowledge to solve certain issues: *"there are Councils that announce these services, but people go there and there is nobody there or they don't know how to solve them"*. In any case, there is a clear understanding that digitalisation may be one of the factors that exclude the most vulnerable people from accessing public services. The Recovery and Resilience Plan has a component related to the digital transition in which it is planned, for example, to invest in the digital transition of Social Security, in the reformulation of public and consular services and in the digitalisation of public administration. It is intended to streamline processes, facilitate access to public services and train professionals. It is fundamental that these changes can reduce the bureaucracy associated to the access to services and can speed up, for example, the automatic renewal of benefits. According to the Portugal 2022 Commission report, Portugal has a "good performance in terms of digital public services", however, in the "domain of digital skills, although slightly above the EU average, 45% of the Portuguese population still lacks basic digital skills. This raises important equity and inclusion issues regarding the access to public services that are now provided online"²¹. It is essential to diagnose these problems and ensure differentiated responses, close to citizens, in access to public services in order to avoid further exclusion and inequality.

Associated to the issue of technologies is the area of **education** which was also referred to as a future challenge, particularly regarding the impact that the pandemic had on children and their learning: *"learning to read and write through an online computer is not for everyone... some had parents, adults at home who helped them to do things minimally, others did not. And there is a very important part of learning that was lost" (...)* the lack of bases will be noticed later on...". In addition to the difficulties and gaps in learning, a concern about socialisation and mental health of children due to the distance imposed during the pandemic period emerged from the discussion: *"Seeing grandfather on the cell phone is not the same as being with grandfather"; "the first four years of school are unforgettable and they didn't have it"*.

According to the National Council for Education study, "at the time of the first closure, schools showed little preparation to deal with emergency remote learning. In addition to the weaknesses regarding equipment, the limited teaching and learning practices using ICT proved to be a difficulty. Both access to equipment and the lack of adequate training in computer literacy among families, students and teachers conditioned teaching and learning, generating inequalities"²². At the same time, the impact on the psychological wellbeing of children should be highlighted. In a study²³

²⁰ *Poverty Watch Portugal 2021*, EAPN Portugal, September 2021. Available at: <https://www.eapn.pt/documento/732/poverty-watch-portugal-2021>

²¹ European Commission, *Portugal 2022 Report*, Brussels, 23.5.2022, p.8

²² National Council for Education, *Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Education: Inequalities and equity measures*, October 2021, p.58

²³ Fátima Veiga, Elizabeth Santos; Cátia Santos, Paula Cruz and Teresa Dias, *A Pandemia pela Voz das Crianças*, Cadernos EAPN 26, EAPN Portugal, 2022.

conducted by EAPN Portugal in 2021 with children aged 6-12²⁴ we found that, in general, children and teenagers reported that distance learning was harmful for learning (referring to situations of distraction, difficulty concentrating, sleep, lack of motivation and lack of interest, among others), and for socialising with friends during breaks. They also expressed their displeasure with home teaching and considered that real learning takes place in the classroom, with everything that involves school life (playgrounds, games, sports). From the point of view of the perceived impact on emotional health, there were several focus groups in which *children clearly expressed the impact that the pandemic was having on their emotional wellbeing. References to fear, dread, sadness, worry, anxiety, loneliness, nervousness, discomfort, tiredness were present in many of the speeches and in their daily experiences and relationships.*

A final challenge mentioned was the high **prices of food, energy and transport**. In general, people feel a considerable weight of the increases in goods in the family budget: *"I have to manage my budget even more tightly. Because the costs of food have increased, but also electricity and water"; "My son told me that a few months ago, with 70 euros he could fill up his van, and now with 70 euros he makes a week of work. It's a brutal budget burden"; "As the available budget is the same, we can no longer buy, although it is necessary".*

The challenge has to do with the greater difficulty in accessing goods, namely food, but also with the possibility of having a balanced diet in nutritional terms: *"Having a balanced diet is difficult, because fruit and vegetables are very expensive. Not to mention the rest. If that's what a healthy diet is, it's unaffordable"; "I only eat chicken, fruit and eggs...[because you can't afford them]. I have no way of paying for other things. I have to go on a diet. A diet is more expensive for me than eating chicken, fruit ... whatever my budget can afford ... "I can't ask for more because my budget is not enough. I eat that and I have to console myself... I have to drink lactose-free milk. Everything I have to consume is lactose-free, everything is more expensive. I stopped buying butter, I stopped buying ham. I stopped buying things to eat with bread... a very strong soup... I'm not starving. I no longer think about the rest. Why would I think if I can't buy it. I have to come to terms with reality. Whatever my budget gives, that is what I have to live on".*

The national government has put in place some support measures for the most vulnerable population in order to mitigate the impact of inflation on rising prices of goods. Although members of the local councils consider that *"measures to support families are insufficient and do not reach everyone"*, two measures that have contributed to help people were highlighted: the social tariff and the extraordinary support for the most vulnerable families.

The Social Tariff is a measure that came into force in 2016 and consists of "a discount on the tariff for access to low voltage electricity and/or low-pressure natural gas networks, which makes up the final price billed to the electricity and/or natural gas customer"²⁵. The tariff is applied automatically to those who need it, taking into account the information available on Social Security²⁶. In June 2022,

²⁴ A total of 44 focus groups and 2 collective interviews were conducted with a total of 269 children (135 male and 134 female) from Mainland Portugal and Autonomous Regions.

²⁵ <https://www.dgeg.gov.pt/pt/areas-transversais/politicas-de-protecao-ao-consumidor-de-energia/tarifa-social-de-energia/>

²⁶ It can also be requested via a declaration in the case of energy contract holders, family allowance beneficiaries, whose benefits are processed outside the Social Security Information System. See further information: <https://www.dgeg.gov.pt/pt/areas-transversais/politicas-de-protecao-ao-consumidor-de-energia/tarifa-social-de-energia/como-e-atribuida-a-tarifa-social-de-energia/>

the number of beneficiaries of the social tariff for electricity was 766,930 and the number of beneficiaries of the social tariff for natural gas was 50,493. Although opinions are divided between those who see this measure as relevant in reducing expenses: "I have the social tariff... I think it's a good thing, because you don't pay the fees, you don't pay the meter..." and those who consider that it didn't bring great advantages because other expenses overlap the monthly budget: "When I had the social tariff, I didn't find much difference... But now what I say is that I felt an increase around 30% in the household budget. We spend around 30% more than what we used to... We were getting, I won't say comfortable, but we were managing and now we're doing gymnastics again so that we don't cross the water line". Although this division exists, the truth is that this measure aims to apply discounts to household invoices. However, and looking at a bigger problem - that of **energy poverty** - it's an important measure, but insufficient to address it. It is questionable whether, despite the various measures in place, this increase in energy and gas prices will not make people more vulnerable to energy poverty. According to the report by the National Observatory to Combat Poverty²⁷ on the subject, in 2019, Portugal was the 6th country in Europe with the highest proportion of the population (18.9%) in households unable to keep the house adequately heated. Looking at the data for 2020, and although this figure has decreased to 17.5%, Portugal was in 4th place in this European ranking, being 9.2 p.p. below the European average (EU27: 8.2%). The figure doubles to 33.8% when we consider the population below the Poverty threshold.

One of the major problems at national level that contributes to Energy Poverty and also to higher energy costs is related to the low energy efficiency of buildings: the proportion of the population below the risk of poverty threshold affected by this dimension of energy poverty was 56% and above this threshold was 30.1%. The Recovery and Resilience Plan includes a component dedicated to the energy efficiency of buildings, providing for the allocation of 100,000 efficiency vouchers to support energy efficient solutions for families living in energy poverty. The vouchers, worth €1,300 plus VAT, fell short in the first phase: it was intended to allocate 20,000 vouchers in 2021, but in December of that year the Environmental Support Fund announced that the Platform would continue to receive applications during the year 2022 until reaching that target. One of the major barriers of the measure pertains to the fact that, in order to be beneficiaries of the voucher, they must also be owners of the dwelling where they live, which excludes from the outset a considerable number of families living, for example, in social housing.

In terms of gas, the Government also launched in March 2022 a monthly support of €10 for the most vulnerable families to help them buy bottled gas. However, according to Diário de Notícias²⁸, which is based on information from the Ministry of the Environment, this measure only reached, on average, 8 thousand families per month (6.3% of the total amount of 4 million euros that were allocated to the measure). Considering the number of beneficiaries of the social tariff indicated above, we can see that 8 thousand families is a significantly reduced number. DECO points²⁹ out those that could be some of the reasons, namely, the lack of dissemination of the program, bureaucratic difficulties, or the lack of transparency regarding the effective monitoring of its implementation.

²⁷ ONLCP, In the "dark": energy poverty in Portugal in the light of energy transition. Bulletin #9, EAPN Portugal, April 2022. Available at: <https://on.eapn.pt/wp-content/uploads/BOLETIM-9-A-pobreza-energ%C3%A9tica-%C3%A0-luz-da-transi%C3%A7%C3%A3o-energ%C3%A9tica.pdf>

²⁸ [Programa Bilha Solidária chegou a oito mil famílias por mês \(dn.pt\)](https://www.dn.pt/noticias/programa-bilha-solidaria-chegou-a-oito-mil-familias-por-mes-dn)

²⁹ [Bilha Solidária: apoio só chegou a 8 mil famílias por mês \(proteste.pt\)](https://www.proteste.pt/bilha-solidaria-apoio-so-chegou-a-8-mil-familias-por-mes)

Regarding the extraordinary support for families, created in March 2022, it is a measure aimed at supporting households benefiting from the social tariff with €60 for the purchase of foodstuffs. However, this amount is paid only once. Meanwhile, the national government decided to extend the measure also to beneficiaries of social benefits and announced that, in view of the increase in the price of foodstuffs, it was decided to make a new payment of €60 to be paid in July to beneficiaries of the social tariff and in August to beneficiaries of social benefits. In the opinion of the local council members, this is a useful measure because it aims to effectively help families, but it is insufficient as it is only paid once: *"Helping is not only one month... because that is nothing. We have to be realistic. Price regulation taking into account salaries. We see the prices that are being charged and the profits of the companies are huge (e.g., EDP; Jerónimo Martins). The Government should establish bases and while we're not out of the crisis, prices should be fixed so that people can continue to survive... Are we going to be able to survive tomorrow?! Maybe not. The most vulnerable are the first to fall, but those who were trying to hold on will fall later. Domino effect."*

The Government has managed to implement some measures to address rising prices and other structural problems that the country faces (such as housing), however, the fact that **wages and social benefits** are not keeping up with inflation is one of the major concerns pointed out.

The impact of the war between Ukraine and Russia

The situation in Portugal regarding the increase in food and energy prices and fuels worsened with the war situation. Inflation was already high, but the war has contributed to a worsening of the situation, although Portugal is not a country very dependent on Russian energy³⁰. However, there is a clear concern on the part of the members of the local councils, with the fact that the war serves as an excuse for the rampant increase in the prices of the most basic goods, which contrasts with the profits of some companies (as mentioned above). They therefore demand more **transparency** from the Government and the private sector: *"There has to be a lot of truth, a lot of transparency regarding the information given by government entities and private entities because in Portugal there is a very serious problem at the level of the (poorly regulated) market. People who are direct producers who sell to supermarkets at a low price and products are then resold at a very high price. It's not just saying that the war caused prices to rise, but the supermarkets are also taking advantage of the war and social situations like the pandemic to raise prices. We are all very wrong about inflation and price rises. So, the issue of truth and transparency must be at the public and private level"*.

At the same time there is concern that the prolongation of the war will lead to famine and further anger among the people. There is a *sense of uncertainty about the future of the war and its possible extension to other countries*.

Another effect has to do with refugees. Portugal has created a special protection program for Ukrainian citizens, waiving visa requirements³¹, simplifying access to health, finance and social security services, among other support. However, local council members fear that **intolerance**

³⁰ See information shared by Polygraph regarding the statements made by António Costa - Prime Minister of Portugal - in February. According to this source citing official sources, "it is a fact that in Portugal, gas from Russia accounted for, in 2020, only about 9.7% of all imports". <https://poligrafo.sapo.pt/fact-check/portugal-e-menos-dependente-da-energia-da-russia-do-que-outros-paises-da-europa-como-disse-costa>

³¹ A specific online Platform has been set up to support Ukrainian refugees: <https://portugalforukraine.gov.pt/>

situations and **hate speech** towards the other will increase, with the "false" fear that people who arrive may occupy places that other people, nationals, could occupy. However, there is also the understanding that *"Portugal is a safe country, but where they don't want to live"*. The cost of living in Portugal is so high, and job insecurity a serious reality, that this will drive away the citizens of Ukraine who are arriving. In other words, Portugal is a gateway country to other countries that may offer better opportunities.

4. Recovery and resilience in times of uncertainty. What answers concerning the fight against poverty?

"Poverty, in addition to being ethically and civically unacceptable, is a brake on the overall development of the community. The increase or maintenance of a patch of irreducible poverty is a brake on development". These statements, made by the President of the Republic Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa at the closing of the Dialogues on Poverty Congress, besides reinforcing the idea that poverty is a violation of Human Rights, clearly appeal to the need to make fighting poverty a central priority for the country's development.

After many years of calls by EAPN Portugal and other stakeholders for a National Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion Strategy, it was finally created in 2021 and approved at the end of that year. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan presented in 2020, and the targets set by it, boosted the creation of the aforementioned Strategy. Portugal has committed to meeting the following targets by 2030, included in the Strategy:

- to reduce the income poverty rate for the whole population to 10 %, which accounts for a reduction of 660,000 people experiencing poverty;
- to halve income poverty among children, which accounts for a reduction of 170,000 children experiencing poverty;
- to bring child material deprivation indicator closer to the European average in percentage points;
- to halve the income poverty rate of the working poor, which accounts for a reduction of 230,000 workers experiencing poverty;
- to reduce the disparity in the poverty rate of the different territories up to a maximum of 3 percentage points concerning the national average rate.

The rejection of the State budget on October 27, 2021 and the dissolution of Parliament in November had no direct impact on the approval of the National Strategy. However, the need to establish a new Government (elections were scheduled for January 30, 2022) that takes office on March 30 may have influenced the progress of the Strategy, particularly in the establishment of the planned high-level Interministerial Committee (CIAN) and the presentation, within 180 days, of the 2022-2025 Action Plan of the aforementioned Strategy. This situation led EAPN Portugal, together with the Citizenship Forum for the Eradication of Poverty, to "question"³², in July this year, the Prime Minister and the national government on the urgency of implementing the action plan, with its own budget and with the appointment of a Coordinator. The current situation with the impact of the war in Ukraine, the rising cost of living and the structural problems of the national context (such as housing and health) were some of the reasons given for the urgency of this plan³³.

Another central agenda for combating poverty, in particular child poverty, concerns the European Child Guarantee. As one of the priorities that is also part of the European Pillar of Social Rights action

³² Interpellation to the Prime Minister and the Government, July 2022. Available at: <https://www.eapn.pt/documento/773/interpelacao-ao-primeiro-ministro-e-ao-governo-a-importancia-de-operacionalizar-a-estrategia-nacional-de-combate-a-pobreza-2021-2030>

³³ As of the date of completion of this document we have had no information regarding the appointment of the Strategy Coordinator and design of the Action Plan.

plan (for compliance with principle 11 - Childcare and support to children), the approval in 2021 of a Recommendation for the European Child Guarantee³⁴ was considered by the national government as "a great victory for 18 million children experiencing poverty" at European level and an "achievement" of the Portuguese presidency of the Council of the European Union³⁵. Member States had 9 months to prepare the action plan, but Portugal has yet to present its own. In the Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 136/2021, which determines the appointment of a national Coordinator of the Child Guarantee it is stated that "it is the national coordinator's responsibility to prepare, with the aim of presenting to the European Commission within nine months (by March 15, 2022), an action plan covering the period until 2030, to implement the Recommendation, taking into account the national, regional and local circumstances, as well as the strategic actions and measures in place to support children in need". The National Coordinator of this initiative is appointed in October 2021³⁶, but Portugal was one of the countries which still missed the deadline for delivering the Action Plan by March 2022. The change of government was one of the reasons for this situation. In February, EAPN Portugal publicly presented a set of contributions³⁷ for the definition of the aforementioned plan in which we highlight the importance of making a diagnosis on the situation of children in Portugal, the holistic approach of intervention, the attention paid to the individual profile of the family and the child at risk and the importance of children's participation.

According to a representative of the National Coordination of Child Guarantee³⁸, there is already a draft plan 2022-2030 that is in the "approval phase in the various sectoral areas of the Government" and will enter public consultation. The approved strategic areas³⁹ are:

- *Employment, Qualification and Skills*: integration into the labour market and wage valuation; youth and adult qualification.
- *Social protection and social action*: social protection of children and young people and their families; close and integrated social action for families with children and young people experiencing poverty.
- *Quality services*: early childhood responses; educational response and activities in a school context; health care, disease prevention and specialised care; access to healthy food and access to decent housing.
- *Children and young people with special vulnerability*: children and young people at risk or in residential care; migrant and refugee children and young people; Roma children and young people.

³⁴ Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of June 14, 2021 on the creation of a European Child Guarantee. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021H1004>

³⁵ Statements by Ana Mendes Godinho, Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, in June 2021.

³⁶ Order 10047/2021 of 15 October appoints Sónia Almeida as National Coordinator of the Child Guarantee: <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/despacho/10047-2021-172873024>

³⁷ Implementation of the national Child Guarantee Plan. EAPN Portugal Contributions to the Action Plan, February 2022. Available: <https://www.eapn.pt/documento/758/implementacao-do-plano-nacional-da-garantia-para-a-infancia>

³⁸ Presentation by Dr Lia Cavaleiro at the event Food Insecurity - Policies and Practices in Portugal held online on June 21. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjGF0ntDNCw&t=28s>

³⁹ Information taken from the power point presented by Dr Lia Cavaleiro at the event Food Insecurity - Policies and Practices in Portugal.

Both National Anti-Poverty Strategy and Child Guarantee are central to achieving the targets Portugal has set for reducing poverty by 2030. It is essential that both action plans have the appropriate budgetary allocation to meet the proposed goals and targets. While the RRP will play a key role in funding a number of measures, it will be complementary to the upcoming 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework. On July 14, Portugal signed the Partnership Agreement⁴⁰ with the European Commission, with an overall amount of 23 billion euros, which concretisation in Portugal 2030.

According to the Portugal 2030 portal,⁴¹ this new financial framework will be implemented "through 12 programs: four thematic programs - Demography, qualifications and inclusion; Innovation and digital transition; Climate action and sustainability and Sea; five Regional, corresponding to the NUTS II for the Mainland, two for the Autonomous Regions and one for Technical Assistance. To these are added the European Territorial Cooperation Programs where Portugal takes part". The programs are currently being designed and will gradually enter public consultation⁴².

One of the major concerns that EAPN Portugal points out relates to the need for this new Agreement and even the RRP to have real effects on reducing poverty and improving people's living conditions. It is essential to make the programs more flexible and accessible to local entities in order to promote experimental pilot projects that can directly involve the community. Programs should be monitored and evaluated with the participation of all the players. This monitoring must be based on quantitative and qualitative indicators that make it possible to verify the effective contribution of the funds to poverty reduction.

In the State of the Nation debate, the Prime Minister announced that a new package of measures will be presented in September to support household income and business activity in response to the rising inflation that has been taking place. Portugal faces an economic and social crisis that needs a structured and integrated response involving all Ministries, local authorities, private, public and third sector entities and also citizens. The roll-out of the aforementioned strategies is central and these should be the starting point for effective, structural changes at national level.

New package of measures to support families⁴³

On 5 September, the Council of Ministers approved a new package of measures to support families to address rising inflation and the cost of living. The "Families First" program has a budget of 2400 million euros. Of the measures presented, we highlight the extraordinary support of €125 that will be awarded, only once, and in the month of October, to each citizen with an income of up to €2700 per month. Unlike the extraordinary support created in March, the amount is now higher and is also intended to reach middle-class families. In the case of households with children, this support is added to another one of €50 for each descendant. Another measure concerns the payment to pensioners, also in October, of an extraordinary supplement equivalent to half a month's pension. Measures

⁴⁰ Available at: <https://portugal2030.pt/portugal-2030/>

⁴¹ www.portugal2030.pt

⁴² *Demography, Qualifications and Inclusion* Program, that will play a central role in the national implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, went into public consultation from July 28 to September 8.

⁴³ Poverty Watch 2022 was completed in August 2022, however, it is important to leave this reference to the package of measures that the Government presented on September 5, 2022.

were also presented to reduce the energy bill, the possibility of allowing gas consumers to return to the regulated market and measures relating to fuels were extended⁴⁴.

The measures presented did not reach consensus, although they are being seen as an aid. However, as mentioned by Jardim Moreira, President of EAPN Portugal, a structured, organized response oriented towards the poorest people is needed. It is important to mention that so far there is no information on the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Poverty.

⁴⁴ <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc23/comunicacao/noticia?i=governo-aprova-programa-de-2400-milhoes-para-apoiar-rendimentos-das-familias>

5. Recommendations

- **Definition and implementation of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (ENCP) Action Plan.** The action plan is urgent so that the goals and targets defined in the Strategy can be met. The Action Plan should be participatory and mobilise the participation of all players - entities and citizens.
- **Roll-out of the European Child Guarantee Action Plan.** As with the ENCP plan, it is essential that this plan can involve different stakeholders in its implementation and monitoring. It is urgent that the plan be put out for public consultation in order to ensure its roll-out.
- **Allocation of funding to the Strategies that have been defined, namely the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.** It is necessary to strategically mobilise the funds that Portugal is receiving, whether for the recovery from the effects of the pandemic, or for the fight against poverty and the strengthening of social cohesion.
- **Promotion of an effective discussion concerning minimum social standards policies - minimum wage and social benefits - with a view to their reformulation in terms of coverage, accessibility, adequacy and promotion of participation.** Alongside adequate income, it is fundamental to guarantee access to quality public services, free of charge and accessible to all.
- **Recognition of the importance of the participation of people experiencing poverty.** The exercise of participation should be promoted and sustained over time in order to achieve results. *"One of the new challenges for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is their participation in the struggle to eradicate the phenomenon, through legal claims that demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the reality in which society finds itself, with the aim of raising awareness of the social and political decision-makers as to the current reality".*
- **Roll-out and participatory monitoring of the structural funds and the RRP.** Instruments should be created to promote the participation of different players in monitoring the funds. These instruments should be based on specific and transparent indicators.
- **Transparency in the announcement and application of funds is central.** The application of the funds that Portugal is receiving should aim at the growth of the country as a whole and not just certain sectors and/or certain particular interests. The fight against corruption and fraud should take place not only when the funds and programs are put into operation, but when the criteria for their allocation are defined.
- **Times of crisis are prone to the emergence of more hate speech and stereotypes regarding the most vulnerable groups.** "The discrimination to which [people experiencing poverty] are subjected, often [in a] silent way, pushes them into situations of exclusion, unemployment and poverty. It also leads them to situations of suffering, disappointment and unease that affect their identity, their inclusion and, above all, their ability to claim and uphold their rights"⁴⁵. **Aporophobia** - fear, rejection, hostility and aversion towards poor people and poverty, encompassing people without resources, the destitute, among others - **must be fought through public campaigns, discussions, training aimed at different players in society in order to change mindsets and narratives about the reality of Poverty and the groups that find themselves in this situation.**

⁴⁵ Fr Jardim Moreira's speech at the Iberian Seminar on Aporophobia that took place on April 7, 2022.

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