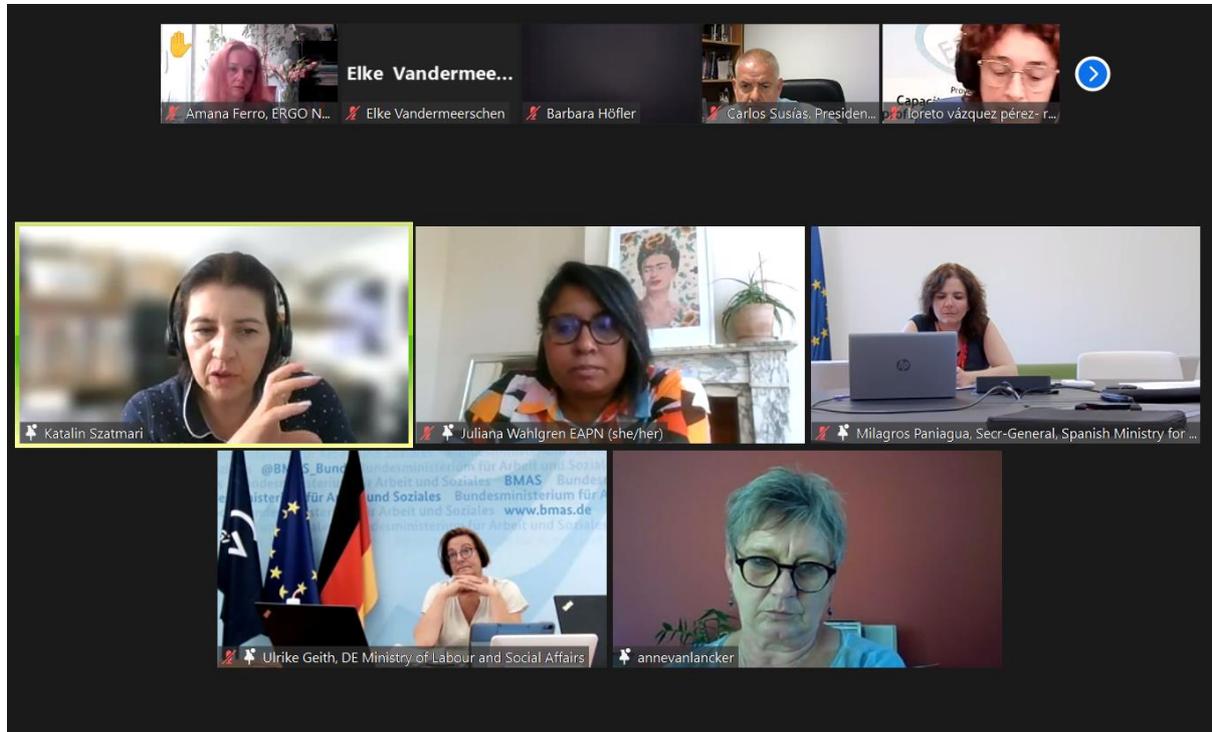


# INTRODUCTION



## CARLOS SUSIAS

EAPN President

- The impact of multiple crises and the need for a binding framework, a strong governance system and structural solutions. 91 million in Europe are in a situation of severe poverty, 1 in 5 people, and Covid-19 made poverty more intense and widespread.
- Inflation and energy prices were already going up before the Ukraine war and it is disproportionately impacting people in poverty and vulnerable households.
- More than ever, there is a need for a strong MIS to uplift people out of poverty. Therefore, in the absence of a Framework Directive on Minimum Income, we need a strong Council Recommendation.

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## FIRST SESSION:

# ENSURING A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO MINIMUM INCOME PROTECTION

Two things are needed:

- Standards of high quality and based on rights
- Clear and comprehensive follow-up systems must be put in place to ensure effective implementation of MI schemes

### EMMANUEL BUTA KOSSI

EAPN Belgium

Accessing minimum income when in need.

As a facilitator for the CPAS (social welfare centre) in Brussels, as well as youth ambassador for the CPAS, he works to improve trust and access of young people to social benefits.

#### KEY MESSAGES

##### On adequacy

- MI (Revenue Integration Social) must increase with inflation, otherwise it cannot help.

##### On non-take-up

- Inadequacy also acts as an accessibility issue as the barriers, bureaucracy and difficult procedures act as additional deterrents to receiving an already inadequate low amount of MI. Moreover, solidarity and individual solution are found to overcome the lack of access, potentially leading to more isolation and creating a vicious circle of non-take-up. There is a need for better accessibility, in terms of access to information on rights and in terms of procedures.

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## KAHINA RABAHI

EAPN Policy and Advocacy Coordinator

### EAPN's position for a strong Council Recommendation

#### KEY MESSAGES

- Universal rights-based approach: Current Minimum Income Systems (MISs) are failing to get people out of poverty which is a violation of human rights.

#### On adequacy

- To secure an adequate and accessible MIS, qualitative and quantitative indicators need to be developed. MIS need to be at least 60% of the median income and must be linked to reference budgets. They are a benchmark to assess the adequacy of people's net income as they help to understand what kind of living standard can be reached with an income at the level of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. **EAPN, therefore, advocates for a common EU-wide framework and methodology for reference budgets.**
- Minimum incomes should, in fact, be automatically indexed in all countries according to the changing cost of living and inflation
- Strong participatory approach of the evaluation on social impact assessment that include people experiencing poverty and CSOs.

#### On accessibility

- Advocated against reforms increasing the restrictiveness of eligibility criteria of MIS, i.e. their coverage, and/or reducing the duration of minimum income benefits and urges on the need to address the problem of non-take-up of MI benefits, (barriers of process: bureaucracy, information gaps, digital) and increasing restrictions on eligibility
- MIS as should be used as an activation instrument to enter the labor market, EAPN strongly discourages any reforms that restrain access to MI. reforms on the eligibility criteria, conditionality (meaning force labor and unpaid traineeship) or the shortening of unemployment benefits

#### On the enabling characteristics

- EAPN advocates for a more positive approach to addressing the social and health needs of people facing complex obstacles to accessing the labor market. This consists of individualized support to access key rights through a case management approach
- A person-centered approach, based on one's needs and issues will have a better outcome in a right-based MIS.

#### A Council Recommendation for an upward convergence:

- Each member state should ensure a sustainable funding mechanism through taxation which is fair and redistribute wealth and resources. EU fund must support the implementation of such MIS, including in the research and awareness raising and mutual learning practices.

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## REACTIONS

- Vision for a right-based approach in the MI Recommendation?
- Implementation of the Recommendation during the Belgian Council Presidency

### KARINE LALIEUX

Belgian Minister of Pensions, Social Integration and the Fight against Poverty (by Javeau Boris and Benoit Provost from her Cabinet)

#### KEY MESSAGES

- The Minister is currently working on two important reforms: Pension reform to improve lower pensions and the Action Plan Against Poverty. The Minister is also prioritizing measures for the 18-25 aged people, to facilitate a person-centered access to rights, for young, disadvantaged people, rather than linking their rights to their family situation.
- In the Federal Plan on the Fight against Poverty and Inequality (to come in July), there are several measures to improve income and purchasing power through the increase of MI amount, additional aids in the context of reference budgets based on the actual needs of people and automatization of rights to improve accessibility.
- During its EU Presidency in 2024, Belgium wants to be an example of quality social protection and inclusion and will support an ambitious MI Recommendation.
- Belgium will work toward a clear MI action plan and monitoring system for each EU country. There is already a budget for 2023 to reinforce exchanges and studies on MI, at EU level, and Belgium wishes to involve CSOs and citizens with direct experience of poverty.

### IONE BELARRA

Spanish Minister of Social Rights and agenda 2030

#### KEY MESSAGES

- MI is a structural solution to poverty and should be part of a comprehensive package that ensures an adequate level to have a good decent life and get out of the poverty trap
- Schemes should not be based on conditionalities linked to employment, priority is to improve dignity, citizenship and social protection to incentivize inclusive employability and participation in employment opportunities. Indeed, rights to job stability, social protection and MI should be based on rights.
- Spain has the third-highest level of child poverty in Europe. One of the latest modifications in the “Ingreso Mínimo Vital” consists of additional funding for children. The Social Rights Ministry is working on a universal parenting income in the context of the new family law, to fight against child poverty. In

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fact, fiscal deduction proved to be a very inefficient tool because lower-income households cannot access any benefits as they are not obliged to submit an income statement.

## SECOND SESSION:

# WILL THE EU RECOMMENDATION ON MINIMUM INCOME SCHEMES DELIVER FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY?

How to ensure a meaningful impact even with a soft law instrument as the recommendation is, and how EU institutions and national authorities would develop a robust governance system?

### CRISTINA VOINEA

EAPN Romania, member of RYMA, a Roma Youth Association

#### KEY MESSAGES

- The first in the family that has had access to higher education because she received a scholarship reserved for Roma people, although the scholarship has strict eligibility criteria.
- the promotion of Roma youth is a driving force for their community development. They advocate for equal access to education and the reduction of poverty among children and youth.
- The minimum Income in Romania is around 30 euros which is not enough to pay for further education. Only 1/5 of children living in low-income households can avoid poverty as a result of social transfers in Romania.
- Since 2001, MI has undergone several transformations that restricted access to those most in need of social assistance. Conditionalities are not tailored to their needs, instead, they trap them in a demanding bureaucracy system of labor market integration. Inability to ensure their own well-being, thus misery and social exclusion are the consequences. To receive MI, the recipient must perform monthly community service. Beneficiaries tend to perceive the benefit as well-deserved pay for their work rather than social aid. Also, there

is an imbalance between the difficulty and the amount of work done, and the money received by the program.

- In the opinion of beneficiaries, there is no visible difference between before and after receiving the minimum income benefit, because the money received is insufficient to cover basic daily needs.

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*Only a fifth of children living in low-income households can avoid poverty as a result of social transfers in Romania, compared to 40% on average in the EU.*



ROMANIAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK

CRISTINA VOINEA

## ANNE VAN LANCKER

Independent Expert

### KEY MESSAGES:

- **Clarification of what adequate MI is.** The AROP threshold of 60% of median income should be a guiding mechanism for regular updating to prevent the erosion of MI. there are concerns of adding additional social benefits to cash ones, because often they are non-enforceable social rights, discretionary, and they are granted to cover specific costs such as housing, energy, and child benefits.
- **Clear definition of Accessible income.** Research showed that in many countries there are discriminatory criteria for eligibility, for example, related to age or residence.

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- MIS should connect with active labor market policies and access to quality and affordable essential services.
  - The recommendation must be grounded on the right competencies of the EU. It means that the social policy competence on measures to integrate people excluded from the labor market must be combined with social cohesion policies to cover people in work poverty too. To stress that MI is a social right, references to the Chart of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the European Social Charter must be included
  - To have a change, a strong governance framework with a clear monitoring system is needed. The social scoreboard is a good starting point, but it lacks recent data on take-ups, which are very important to measure the efficiency of the scheme. **Benchmarks, on top of indicators, should help to measure progress.** Action plans, with timelines and concrete objectives, must be produced by MS and followed by progress reports, developed in dialogue with civil society stakeholders and people experiencing poverty so that they can follow up, and this information can be used in the semester process
  - **Progress on the recommendation should be linked to EU funding**, especially the Recovery and Resilience Fund, Next Generation EU and ESF+ because some MS lack the resources to implement adequate schemes.

## REACTIONS

### MILAGROS PANIAGUA

Secretary General at the Spanish Ministry for Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, and President at the European Minimum Income Network.

#### KEY MESSAGES

- There is a substantial issue: non-take-up. several analyses have been conducted since the implementation of the scheme: the ex-ante estimation of those entitled to the benefit based on tax data and census data found around 800 000 eligible households.
- They work with NGOs, such as EAPN to enlarge the coverage of the scheme. Non-take-up is something on which all countries must work.

### KATALIN SZATMÁRI

European Commission, DG EMPL

#### KEY MESSAGES

- The recommendation on MI should be seen as part of a package that also includes the Child guarantee, The Access to Social Protection for All Recommendation, and the Minimum Wage directive, in the European Pillars of Social Rights Action Plan.
- Toward the end of the year, the Commission will publish a staff working document on access to essential services. It is important to work on the distributional impact assessment in the current situation of crisis.

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- the adequacy, and the coverage of MIS. There is a full benchmarking framework. They are working on the improvement of this framework. Data and information are still lacking especially on labor market activation and access to services. MS highlighted the issue of non-take-up saying that further exploring the reasons for non-take-up across all MS, which is between 30% and 50%, is needed.

## ULRIKE GEITH

Head of Unit Economic Aspects of European Social Affairs, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Germany

### KEY MESSAGES

Claims of the Conclusions of the German of the Presidency in 2020:

- Member States were asked to implement EPSR and strengthen MIS.
- Member States were asked to strengthen the monitoring and cross-country assistance.
- Member States were asked to make the best use of targeted support from EU funds.
- EC was asked to update the union network framework to complement and support the policies of MS.
- EC, SPC, and EMPL Committee were encouraged to develop benchmarks and indicators.

## ADDITIONAL REACTIONS FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

### Amana Ferro, ERGO:

According to the fundamental rights agency, over 80 % of Roma people experiences poverty; only 43% are in paid employment, and 41% experience anti-gypsyism daily. So, for racialized communities MIS is important, and yet it doesn't work because the amounts are low, and in many cases, they cannot be combined with other benefits. Anti-gypsyism is further stigmatization that these people face. Non-take-up is high for these reasons. We are missing a right-based approach that can overcome discrimination and unequal access to MI.

The procedure is overly complicated and problematic for undocumented people with no official address. Services are not supportive, and usually, they are provided by community-based organizations and NGOs. Conditionality also remains a strong barrier.

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# CONCLUSIONS

- The Commission will present its proposal for a council recommendation by the end of autumn 2022.
- EAPN Europe and its members, alongside with CSOs and relevant stakeholders will continue their advocacy and mobilization for the adoption of a strong council recommendation by 2025.

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EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK

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