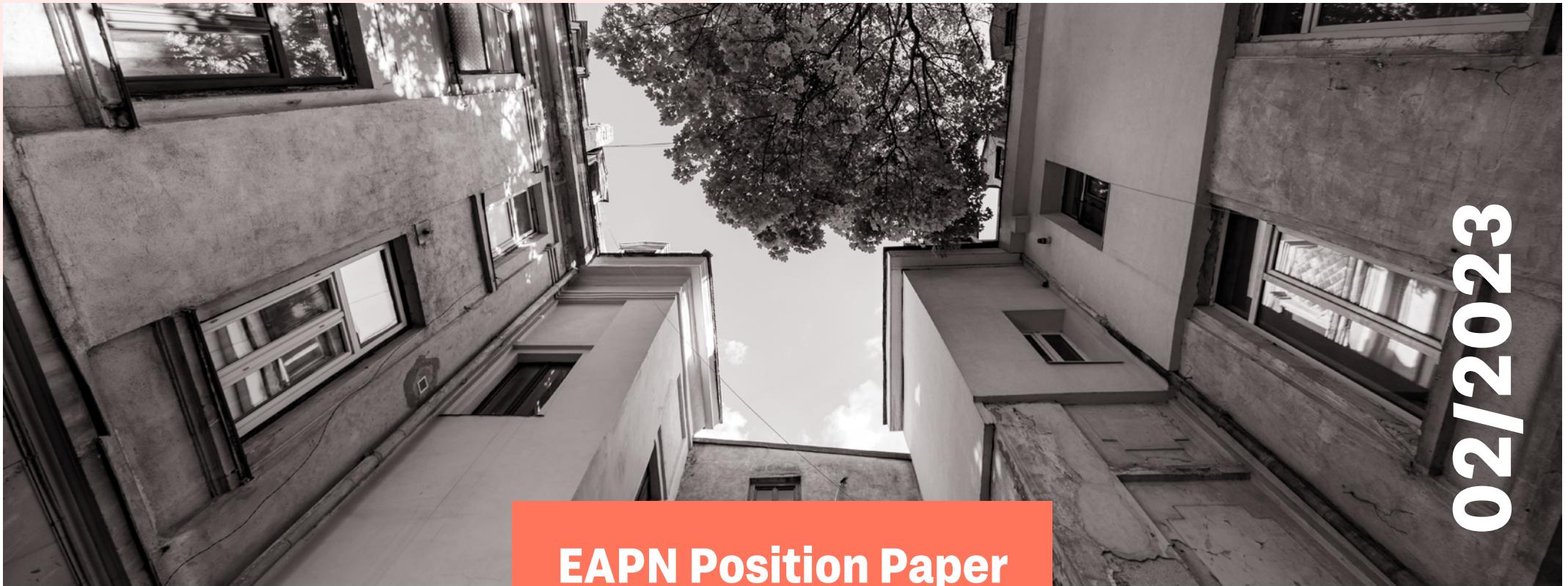


# Minimum Income Council Recommendation: Not Enough To Fight Poverty



EAPN Position Paper



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

**The European Anti-Poverty Network  
(EAPN)** is an independent network of  
non-governmental organisations (NGOs)  
and groups involved in the **fight against  
poverty and social exclusion** in the  
Member States of the European Union,  
established in 1990.

# EAPN Europe Analysis

EAPN has advocated for decades for the **right to adequate minimum income** across Europe, including coordinating the **EMIN network** campaign with its members and other stakeholders at the national and EU levels. Minimum Income Schemes (MIS) are an essential, integral part of **universal social protection schemes** and a comprehensive, rights-based, person-centred **active inclusion approach** that ensures adequate income. MIS are a crucial element in **multidimensional integrated anti-poverty strategies** both at the national and EU levels. They help to guarantee a **minimum standard of living** and a **decent life** for all and enable people to fully **participate in society**, by targeting people unable to access decent employment, not earning enough from employment, no longer entitled to other types of social benefits (e.g. after expiration of unemployment benefits) and/or retiring with short pension contribu-

tion periods. Well-designed and effective MIS play a vital role in providing **income protection** and - when coupled with **enabling essential services** - they can provide **a route out of poverty to those people who are most in need**. They are also the foundation for building **more equal and socially-just societies**, if sustainably financed through **redistributive progressive tax systems**.

Even though in 2023, all EU Member States have minimum income schemes in place, they vary significantly across countries in terms of adequacy and accessibility, to the point that **no European minimum income scheme matches the actual needs of beneficiaries**, our members report. They fail to lift millions of people above the poverty line and leave the individuals concerned **stigmatised, isolated and trapped in a cycle of poverty and social exclusion**.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> EAPN Position Paper on Adequate Minimum Income (2020, May). EAPN. [www.eapn.eu/eapn-position-paper-on-adequate-income/](http://www.eapn.eu/eapn-position-paper-on-adequate-income/)

This is particularly the case for vulnerable groups<sup>2</sup> who face higher risks of poverty and social exclusion, and for whom minimum income schemes are important safety nets. Given this, EAPN welcomes the Council Recommendation on Adequate Minimum Income ensuring active inclusion, formally adopted as A-item at the Council of the European Union on **30 January 2023**, as a step forward in implementing principle 14 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. However, we warn that a Recommendation remains entirely voluntary in its application by EU Member States. EU soft law has not allowed sufficient and sustainable progress on poverty reduction. For EAPN, the only way to ensure an adequate income for all across the EU is **a Framework Directive on Minimum Income** with a common set of such minimum requirements and provisions. These should include coverage, accessibility, adequacy, enabling character and regular updates of amounts.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the Council Recommendation on Adequate Minimum Income, EAPN welcomes the:

- ↗ reference made to principle 14 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- ↗ overall aim of the recommendation to ensure “a life in dignity at all stages of life”, in contrast to a minimal approach that would have focused only on a restrictive definition of poverty.
- ↗ attention given to the minimum level of adequacy defined by the national at-risk-of-poverty (AROP) threshold and reference budgets (i.e. the monetary value of necessary goods and services, including adequate nutrition, housing, healthcare and essential services, according to the national definitions).
- ↗ recognition of the importance of guaranteeing access to enabling and essential services and other key social rights for minimum income beneficiaries as rights and not just as “conditions” or “instruments” to get them into work e.g. decent housing, education, affordable healthcare.

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<sup>2</sup> Our reference to vulnerable groups includes migrants, women, Roma, racialised communities, LGBTI, elderly, persons with disabilities and youth.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, read *Expert Study on a Binding EU Framework on Adequate National Minimum Income Schemes* | A. Van Lancker, A. Aranguiz, H. Verschueren. (2021, May 6). EAPN. [www.eapn.eu/expert-study-on-a-binding-eu-framework-on-adequate-national-minimum-income-schemes-a-van-lancker-a-aranguiz-h-verschueren/](http://www.eapn.eu/expert-study-on-a-binding-eu-framework-on-adequate-national-minimum-income-schemes-a-van-lancker-a-aranguiz-h-verschueren/)

- ↗ identification of non-take-up as a major issue.
- ↗ possibility to request minimum income for individual members of the household, therefore reducing the gender poverty gap and improving the financial independence of people in vulnerable situations such as women, young people and persons with disabilities.
- ↗ specific mention of young adults in the coverage clauses.
- ↗ ability to access minimum income without a permanent address, and as a result facilitating access to Roma people,<sup>4</sup> migrants, racialised communities, and people living in homelessness or shelters.
- ↗ access to simple, rapid, impartial and free-of-charge complaint and appeal procedures to all.
- ↗ measures to ensure access to inclusive labour markets, including the incentive for targeted measures for young adults not in employment, education or training.

- ↗ intention to reinforce mutual learning and good practices among Member States.
- ↗ provision of individualised support, through a case management person-centred approach, within 3 months.



<sup>4</sup> "The umbrella term 'Roma' encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.)." from *Roma equality, inclusion and participation in the EU*. (2020, October 7). European Commission. Retrieved January 26, 2023, from [https://commission.europa.eu/content/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/content/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu_en)

**1**

## On the other hand, EAPN regrets:

***The lack of an explicit universal rights-based approach to adequate minimum income, which overcomes discrimination and unequal access and leaves no one behind.***

**2**

***That Member States are recommended to regularly review and, whenever relevant, adjust the level of minimum income in order to maintain the adequacy of income support.***

## EAPN's Recommendations

## Rationale

Adopt an explicit universal rights-based approach to MIS in a multidimensional integrated anti-poverty strategy, with measures targeting specific vulnerable groups.

Refrain from having negative and punitive conditionalities (e.g. forcing people to take up low-paid and insecure jobs, unpaid traineeships or the reduction or suspension of unemployment benefits when access to minimum income is requested.)

This will guarantee the implementation of Article 14 of the EPSR, universal rights and non-punitive and unconditional access to MIS as well as facilitate policies to eradicate high non-take-up rates.

MIS should be automatically indexed in all countries according to the changing cost of living and inflation.

Ensure that MIS take people out of poverty by being above the 60% median disposable household income poverty threshold, underpinned by national reference budgets.

Regular indexation remains soft terminology, in particular in times of volatile increasing prices. Automated indexation based on inflation and cost of living is crucial to maintain the adequacy of MIS, coupled with strong reference budget methodologies that include social participation.

3

## On the other hand, EAPN regrets:

***The lack of a common EU-wide framework and methodology on reference budgets.***

4

***The lack of concrete sustainability measures/best practices on the financing of MIS.***

## EAPN's Recommendations

Reference budgets of baskets of goods and services to check the adequacy of MIS need to be developed, for different household types and with the involvement of people, not only with those in poverty. They must capture the real costs of essential goods and services.

Ensure a sustainable funding mechanism through progressive taxation which is fair and redistributes income, wealth and resources.

EU funds should be targeted to support the development of effective national MIS.

## Rationale

Reference budgets are a promising instrument to build consensus in society about what is an adequate income, in other words, a standard for a decent life, comprising amounts necessary to also lead a decent social life. They take into account cross-country variations in the institutional setup of the welfare state – including public services and/or public direct or indirect subsidies for essential goods and services – as well as in the type of benefits provided, be they in cash, in kind or services. They can also reflect related additional costs e.g. for childcare, (special) medical needs, accommodation, or (public) transport.<sup>5</sup>

MIS should be financed as a central redistribution mechanism, its funding mechanisms should explicitly create consensus on how wealth should be shared to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities.

<sup>5</sup> For more information read ***Report and Recommendation from the Peer Review on use of Reference Budgets for policy purposes.*** (September, 2018) EMIN. [https://emin-network.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/reference\\_budgets\\_report\\_emin\\_peer\\_review.pdf](https://emin-network.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/reference_budgets_report_emin_peer_review.pdf)

5

### On the other hand, EAPN regrets:

***That access to minimum income is based on proportionate length of legal residence, thereby potentially excluding individuals with temporary residence, refugees and undocumented migrants.***

6

***The collection of disaggregated data was only requested on the grounds of sex, age and disability.***

### EAPN's Recommendations

Ensure that everyone has equal access to minimum income, without discrimination, regardless of legal and residence status, gender identity, employment status, contractual arrangements, race, ethnicity, or other characteristics.

### Rationale

The lack of definition of what "proportionate length" leaves discretionary power to EU Member States which will not sufficiently challenge the barriers faced by migrants in access to MIS.

## On the other hand, EAPN regrets:

***There are no concrete measures to overcome structural discriminatory and biased approaches and non-take-up by vulnerable groups such as Roma, refugees, women, racialised minorities, and undocumented migrants.***

7

## EAPN's Recommendations

Tackling the high rates of non-take-up must be an urgent priority. Member States can do this by:

- creating partnerships with civil society organisations and/or service providers;
- through automatic application to those who need minimum income, taking into account the information available on social security/national registries;
- reducing digital poverty whilst still providing offline information and simple administrative and implementation procedures;
- making minimum income information fully understandable to those in need;
- adapting existing provisions to ensure non-discrimination against any group of (actual or potential) beneficiaries of minimum income benefits; and
- adjusting existing policies or measures to cater for special and/or increased needs of individuals, households, or groups.

## Rationale

Non-take-up rates for racialised or LGBTQI+ people are still concerning but without proper data, Members States will remain unable to design targeted and effective policies.

The participation of those communities is paramount to ensure an appropriate solution to the high non-take-up rates.

8

**On the other hand, EAPN regrets:**

***That it does not specify the age from which adequate minimum income should be available.***

**EAPN's Recommendations**

The right to an adequate minimum income must be enforced from the age of 18.

**Rationale**

Young adults must not be covered by sub-minimum income schemes, which provide inadequate social protection below the poverty line. Sub-minimum income schemes fail to act as incentives to work and trap young adults in poverty at a very young age.

9

***The responsibility for the triennial reporting moved from Member States to the European Commission and that the participation of minimum income recipients was not included in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages.***

Minimum income recipients, as well as CSOs that support them, must be involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of MIS, which must take place every year.

Member States must adopt clear and detailed participative monitoring systems for the implementation of MIS with benchmarks and indicators to measure progress.

Member States must ensure results are publicly available and subject to yearly discussion with stakeholders including CSOs and people in poverty.

Beneficiaries are the experts on their own realities and their participation will enable Member States to design accessible, adequate and enabling MIS.

Building effective MIS with high take-up rates, depends on embedding participative methods, and systematically engaging people receiving benefits and CSOs, throughout the implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages.

**On the other hand, EAPN regrets:**

***There is little mention of the need for coordination and integration of minimum income support and social services provision.***

**EAPN's Recommendations**

Guarantee an adequate ratio (which must be regularly reviewed) of individualised support cases for case managers and require joined-up working between officers providing MI and social services support on a regular basis.

Reinforce the human resources/capacity of the authorities in charge of minimum income support, employment services and providers of enabling services. They must also be provided with professional training to fight stereotypes towards MIS and poverty.

**Rationale**

"Social service providers are best placed to actively outreach to people in need of support and to identify the specific needs of individuals to develop person-centred pathways toward active inclusion into society."<sup>6</sup> Working conditions of service providers are lacking in the Council Recommendation, although quality working conditions will only ensure effective access to MIS.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

# Conclusion

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In conclusion, the current Minimum Income Schemes are failing to get people out of poverty which is a violation of their fundamental rights. According to Eurostat, in 2021, 95.4 million people were estimated to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion. EAPN strongly believes that social protection is not only about social justice or human rights. It is also a good investment from an economic point of view: as people experiencing poverty spend their social benefits on essential costs of living expenses, including housing (as way too often they cannot afford to make savings), social benefits operate as automatic stabilisers and function as an economic stimulus package, contributing to more cohesion and better social inclusion. They can also help safeguard aggregate economic demand in times of crises and beyond, therefore they must be adequate and accessible to all in need.

Having a strong and permanent thematic and advocacy focus on minimum income is part of EAPN's "raison d'être" and DNA.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we reiterate our urgent call for a binding EU Framework Directive on Adequate Minimum, which must be designed with meaningful participation of civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty and take into consideration the above recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

We count on all EU Member States to guarantee principle 14 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, that is, the right to minimum income, for everybody, throughout their lives, that is adequate, accessible, and enabling, underpinned by social rights and a human-rights approach.

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<sup>7</sup> EAPN Position Paper on Adequate Minimum Income (2020, May). EAPN. [www.eapn.eu/eapn-position-paper-on-adequate-income/](http://www.eapn.eu/eapn-position-paper-on-adequate-income/)

<sup>8</sup> For more information, read *Expert Study on a Binding EU Framework on Adequate National Minimum Income Schemes* | A. Van Lancker, A. Aranguiz, H. Verschueren. (2021, May 6). EAPN. [www.eapn.eu/expert-study-on-a-binding-eu-framework-on-adequate-national-minimum-income-schemes-a-van-lancker-a-aranguiz-h-verschueren/](http://www.eapn.eu/expert-study-on-a-binding-eu-framework-on-adequate-national-minimum-income-schemes-a-van-lancker-a-aranguiz-h-verschueren/)

# Acknowledgements

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