

21ST EUROPEAN MEETING OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

THE UNBEARABLE COST OF LIVING

PEP2023 EU ELECTIONS EDITION



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

EAPN Report



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.



Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Inaugural Session:	4
2. Mobilisation for Change Inspiration from the Past to the Future	9
Responses from participants	9
From Organising to Action	10
Illustrative quotations	11
3. Workshops: The Unbearable Cost of Living	12
The hot air balloon exercise: What helps and hinders our advocacy?	13
From Demands to Change	14
4. The Visibility Action	18
5. Transforming Demands into Commitments	18
6. Key demands from the Workshops	21
Participantss	24

Executive Summary



Participants
in the opening
plenary

The European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty (PeP), launched in 2002, provides a space for people with experience of poverty to join forces across Europe, learn from each other, discuss laws and policies which affect their lives and connect with decision-makers.

The 21st edition of the Meeting (PeP 2023) took place from 14th to 15th November 2023 in Madrid, the first time it met outside Brussels. It was organised by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN Europe) and EAPN Spain, with financial support from DG Employment, the Spanish Ministry of Social Rights Agenda 2030 and La Caixa Foundation.

There were 77 individuals with direct experience of poverty from 26 countries, along with policymakers, facilitators and guests.

Participative workshops considered the conclusions of the [PeP 2022](#) on the theme of The Unbearable Cost of Living and the opportunities to mobilise for the 2024 European Parliament

Elections. These themes were discussed with policy-makers from the European Parliament, European Commission, Belgian Government and United Nations.

Participants discussed how poverty and the cost-of-living crisis were affecting their lives and forcing choices between essentials like food and heating.

There was consensus between participants and the policy-makers that the European initiatives on minimum wages and minimum income were welcome but inadequate. Incomes need to be raised to take into account the real costs of living, and more targeted measures are needed for low-income households. The austerity approaches adopted after 2008 must not be repeated.

Participants and guests also called for a binding instrument at the European level to guarantee the right to accessible, affordable, energy-efficient and quality housing and for measures to prevent energy poverty. Fundamentally, people

with direct experience of poverty need effective participation in the policy processes that affect their lives.

There was also a session on mobilisation for change, a 'visibility action' in Plaza del Museo Reina Sofía to highlight the concerns of participants, and opportunities to network informally.



Fintan Farrell
in memoriam

Fintan Farrell

The PeP 2023 delegations stood for a minute's silence in memory of Fintan Farrell, former EAPN Director and President, who died on Christmas Eve, 2022. Fintan had played a central role in the PeP Meetings since the start. He will be sorely missed.

1. Inaugural Session:

EAPN Director Juliana Wahlgren opened the inaugural plenary session. She thanked participants for taking time from their lives to come to Madrid and share their learning and experiences.

She assured participants that while there would be challenges and difficulties, there would also be moments of solidarity and opportunities to learn from each other.

She thanked EAPN Spain and La Caixa Foundation for making this event possible.

She explained the context for the Meeting, following on from the 2022 Meeting and preparing for the 2024 European Parliament elections, and she welcomed and introduced the speakers.



Maria Fe Torrs
Román

Maria Fe Torrs Román welcomed participants to Madrid on behalf of EAPN Spain). She encouraged everyone to express their views and participate fully and emphasised the importance of creating a safe and respectful space where everyone's ideas are valued.

She called for a greater role for people experiencing poverty in the decisions which shape their lives and said that such opportunities are virtually non-existent in Spain.



Olivier
De Schutte

Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights addressed the Meeting remotely due to conflicting commitments. He emphasised the importance of providing opportunities for people experiencing poverty to provide solutions to policy-makers.

He said that the theme of this Meeting is timely. The cost-of-living crisis, particularly the rise in energy bills, is the worst since 1997 and affects people in poverty the most. In Italy, for example, real wages were reduced by 12% between 2008 and 2012 and the ILO reports that wages have declined worldwide for the first time this century.

He was concerned that Governments may turn to austerity measures in an attempt to address the crisis, which would exacerbate its effects and deepen poverty.

Mr de Schutter said that the World Bank policy of raising interest rates, reflected by the European Central Bank, may lead to a further recession and a challenge to households to repay debt.

There are 21.9 million working poor in the EU, and this will continue unless there is a change in policies. There are many causes of this, including globalisation and retrenchment of welfare states, but the spread of precarious work with zero hours contracts, part-time work and weakening of unions are central.

Decisions at the EU level are crucial. He referred to three policies where action is needed:

1. The 2022 Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages¹ is welcomed. It is clear that increasing job numbers at any cost will not in itself alleviate poverty if it increases precarious work. He referred to a study by the IMF which refuted the widespread belief that high minimum wages lead to inflation and a wage-price spiral;
2. The *Council Recommendation on Adequate Minimum Income Ensuring Active Inclusion*² of January 2023 is also very important. As well as lifting people out of poverty, adequate minimum income schemes can act as a counter-cyclical tool, stabilising demand for goods and services. He welcomed the provision to update minimum income schemes in line with rising costs, using

the Consumer Price Index. The evidence is that people benefitting from adequate social protection are supported to take up work. There is no basis for the popular belief that unemployment is a symptom of poor motivation. The problem is not high benefits but low wages. On the other hand, the rate of non-take-up of benefits is very high across Europe, ranging from 30% to 50%, reaching 57% in Spain. Governments need to reach out actively to poor households to inform them of their rights. They also need to involve people experiencing poverty in the design and implementation of minimum income schemes. Complex language, overuse of online applications and other impediments need to be removed;

3. Discrimination on grounds of poverty is prohibited under international law, but not all States have transposed this into national law. The EU needs to give this the same priority as action against other forms of discrimination. Discrimination against people in poverty can impede access to employment, housing and other necessities for a decent life. The long-term unemployed are particularly vulnerable, with employers reluctant to take them on, seeing their unemployment as a sign of personal failure rather than lack of jobs.

In reply to a question from **Juliana Wahlgren** as to why people in poverty should vote in the European Parliament elections, **Mr De Schutter** said that many key policies need input from people affected by poverty to avoid negative effects. For example, unless carbon taxes and restrictions on older vehicles take account of the impact on people living in poverty, these environmental policies can be seen as a threat. The same is true of digitalisation policies which can make access to services more difficult if they are introduced incorrectly. Low-income households are drastically underrepresented in decision-making.

1 Directive (EU) 2022/2401 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union, <https://www.europeansources.info/record/proposal-for-a-directive-on-adequate-minimum-wages-in-the-european-union/>

2 <https://www.europeansources.info/record/proposal-for-a-council-recommendation-on-adequate-minimum-income-ensuring-active-inclusion/>



Karine Lalieux

Karine Lalieux, Belgian Minister for Pensions and Social Integration

She explained the new law in Belgium obliging the government at all levels to include the participation of people experiencing poverty in policymaking. She said 'You can count on me to take this message everywhere in Europe during our Presidency' (January to June 2024).

The views of EAPN delegations have been important in bringing this perspective to the Belgian government.

She outlined four important meetings under the Belgian Presidency:

1. A meeting to promote the implementation of the Directive on Minimum Wages, which will involve civil society, researchers, social partners as well as Governments. The text should be more binding, and it should promote employment of people currently outside the job market, as well as maintaining minimum wages above the poverty threshold;
2. A meeting under the [European Platform on Combating Homelessness](#);
3. A meeting on the implementation of the [child](#)

[guarantee](#). We need to bring the 5 million children currently in poverty above the poverty threshold;

4. An initiative on digital exclusion, including access to digital training. €18 million will be allocated to stimulate social aspects of digital inclusion.

She looked forward to hearing the ideas from this Meeting.

Juliana Wahlgren mentioned that the EAPN is planning the next PEP Meeting in cooperation with the Belgian Presidency.



Marc Simón

Marc Simón, Assistant Manager, La Caixa Foundation

said that the Foundation is grateful for the chance to support and take part in this important meeting.

La Caixa Foundation was established in 1984 as a citizens' initiative to find ways to help people in need and to create a more equal society. That was a time when there were not even old age pensions in Spain.

La Caixa Foundation has a wide range of social initiatives. They have programmes for children and other disadvantaged groups. They have programmes involving over 80,000 participants. They work closely with social institutions, including NGOs. They also have a strong emphasis on culture for all.

The Foundation's programmes are constantly evolving. Social change is happening very fast and many developments damage the most vulnerable groups.

Poverty in Spain is at serious level and the welfare state cannot be taken for granted.

To make progress and create a more egalitarian Spain, we need to work in collaboration, not compete, and we need perseverance. No one can win without perseverance.

People experiencing poverty need opportunities to speak out and safe spaces to develop ideas.

Carlos Susias, EAPN Spain and EAPN President

thanked La Caixa. He pointed out that this is the first time that the PeP Meeting has happened outside Brussels. We need to work hard to make sure that the voices of people with experience of poverty are heard at all levels. This 21st meeting is part of this process, drawing on local and national preparatory meetings.

We tend to talk about facts and numbers, for example the number of people in poverty in the EU. However, we also need to think about what it really means to be poor. A lot of people hide their poverty out of shame, when it is the broader society which should

shoulder the blame. Poverty means not being able to make ends meet. It means having to make choices all the time, and telling children that you cannot afford what they need. This can lead to tension, frustration and health problems.

The current cost of living crisis requires policies to counter take effects of inflation and energy prices on people in poverty. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the more fundamental changes needed to end poverty.

Decisions at the EU level in the current crisis and the COVID pandemic have been different from the austerity imposed after the 2008 crisis, but we cannot be complacent and assume that the crises are over. We need to translate the European Pillar of Social Rights into an anti-poverty strategy for inclusion.

We applaud the Directive on Minimum Wages. It is important now to ensure that the minimum wage level is maintained above the poverty line. We should also concentrate on the quality of work.

The Recommendation on Minimum Income is also welcome, but it needs to be given legal force to provide a level of income sufficient for a life in dignity for all.

Fundamentally, we need to ensure that the voices of people in poverty are listened to. We take it for granted that farmers are consulted on policies affecting agriculture, but no one asks poor people about policies that affect them.

In many of our concerns, the Commission has played a positive role, but we need the same commitment from Member States.

Thank you to everyone for giving your time to be here and representing other people to make constructive criticisms and proposals.



Carlos Susias

Questions and comments from the floor



Participant from France, reminded the Meeting that the European Economic Community was originally a trade and commercial block, but it has since taken on social functions. However, this social dimension is very fragile. People experiencing poverty are the first to experience hardship and exploitation in crisis, as we remember from the two World Wars. We are now seeing a war against the poor, who are deprived even of an effective minimum wage.

Participant from Ireland, said that she could share the anger and frustration, coming from a background of poverty, but we need to push for real participation and stop holding back out of misplaced shame. We should demand the right to get involved at every level, from local to European.

Participant from Germany agreed that we are not heard in policy-making. Policy making is a very slow business, but meetings like these are a step forward.

Participant from Netherlands said that the money for this work is not sufficient. One coordinator and two participants from each country are not enough to express the views and experiences of people experiencing poverty. We need to allow for more voices.

Participant from Serbia talked about the experience of growing up in poverty. He now tries to teach people the meaning of poverty and how to fight it. The Serbian Government is poor too, and they need to understand that we can help them solve problems.

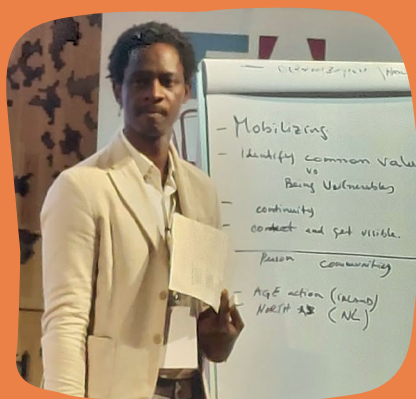
In response, **Maria Fe Tores Román** talked about her own experience of homelessness. This experience made her want to become a poverty advisor and she always insists on the right to participate and give her opinion.

Carlos Susias talked about the feeling of indignity when three ladies came to bring his family food when he was 12. His father always told him that it was not a shame to be poor, it was 'disgusting'. We need to make our voices heard for change.

2. Mobilisation for Change Inspiration from the Past to the Future

People's Power: building the ground for the European Parliament Elections (June 2024).

Fernando Chironda, Policy and Advocacy Officer of EAPN, introduced this session. He said that we are here to share experiences and challenges but also to reflect on our strengths and power.



Fernando Chironda

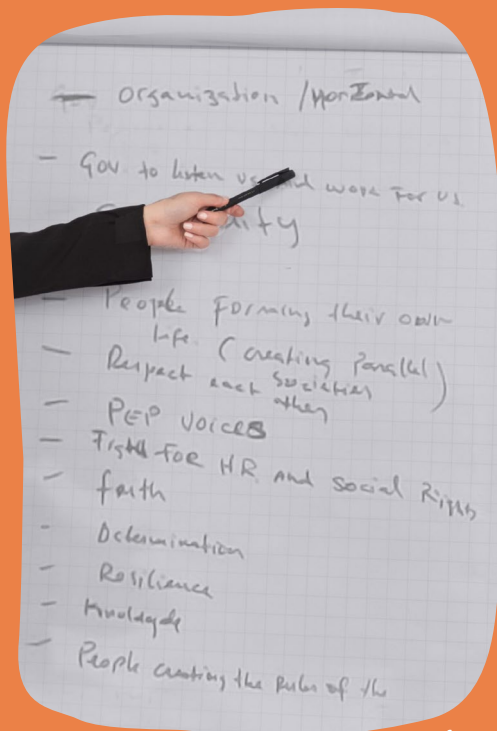
He talked about his own experience of community organising. He was born in a poor neighbourhood in Mozambique, which had water running down the street and no services. In school, children from his area mixed with those from the rich side of the street. He asked himself the reason for the difference between the communities. He helped organise school students from both areas to share food and collect rubbish. This community group grew into a national movement for empowerment, women's rights and the needs of poor neighbourhoods.

When he moved to Italy, he was not an activist at first. However, following the deaths of migrants in Lampedusa, he realised it was important to convene a group of migrants to engage with their issues.

Responses from participants

Question 1: What does people's power mean to you?

- **Participant from Belgium:** Governments should be the servants of the people, not their bosses;
- **Participant from Greece:** Solidarity;
- **Participant from the Netherlands:** the ability to create our own quality of life and create a parallel society if necessary;
- **Participant from Spain:** People experiencing poverty creating the rules of the game, not politicians;
- **Participant from the Netherlands:** opportunities to share our experiences with politicians. Respecting each other and fighting for our rights;
- **Participant from France:** solid organisation;
- **Participant from Austria:** Respecting each other. We have only one planet. There are many stories that bring people together.



Responses
from participants

Question 2: How can your story affect change action for EAPN?

- **Participant from Ireland:** promoting mobilisation;
- **Participant from the Netherlands:** bringing us together regardless of our background;
- **Participant from Portugal:** Telling our stories;
- **Participant from Spain:** Connecting us together to be visible in the fight against poverty.

Question 3: Which group do you identify yourselves with, sharing common values?

- **Participant from Ireland:** Through Age Action Ireland, I am part of a community of change, fighting for equality in state pensions;
- **Participant from Netherlands:** Community organisation. We don't want people to have to experience what we have experienced;
- **Participant from Belgium:** Humanity is my community. We can create our community together;
- **Participant from France:** I have my own mantra: determination, organisation, action, finalisation;
- **Participant from Austria:** If you have no work, you have no power. Lots of groups, but little power.

From Organising to Action

EAPN Director Juliana Wahlgren introduced the session on translating organisation into action.

She explained the approach of her fellow Brazilian, Paulo Freire, who said that the roots of liberation lie in informing ourselves and each other.

She also quoted Saul Alinsky, whose *Rules for Radicals* explained the importance of changing the dynamics of power.

To tackle inequality and poverty, we need to understand their historical roots and transform ourselves through organisation.

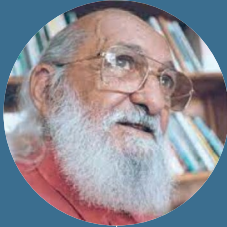


Juliana
Wahlgren

How to translate our goals into actions

- In order to succeed with our goals, we need to know how to plan;
- We cannot conceive something without discussing it with people;
- We need our community not to become burned out;
- Power is also how other people project you;
- We need new approaches;
- Organising is the key.

Illustrative quotations



Liberation

"If the structure does not permit dialogue, structure must be changed."

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Root causes of inequalities

"Development develops inequality.
"The food of the minority is the hunger, of the majority."

Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America



Power dynamics

"Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have."

Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals

Source: Presentation,
PeP meeting,
Juliana Wahlgren

Organising

"Hope is discipline."

Mariame Kaba, We do this 'til we free us



Fernando Chironda, Policy and Advocacy Officer, EAPN outlined the basis of a successful campaign:

1. New narratives: moving from 'me' to 'we';
 2. Strategising: why and how I am/we are doing it;
 3. Mapping: who can help us lift up our concerns;
 4. Using emotion and empathy: to remember, feel the emotion;
 5. Building a sense of belonging.
- We need to gather together to have an impact on the EU elections.

3. Workshops: The Unbearable Cost of Living

Five participative workshops provided an opportunity to discuss the themes of the Meeting in more depth and to develop proposals and strategies for change, particularly in the context of the 2024 European Parliament elections.



The Workshops on
Energy and Food

The workshops all started with a *hot air balloon* exercise, to identify the challenges, our strengths, the baggage which weighs us down, external factors and our allies.

Each workshop then considered the relevant conclusions from the previous Meeting, in 2022. From this, and from participants' own experiences, they developed demands to bring to the policy-makers the next day. These demands are summarised at Section 6.

The five thematic workshops

1. Adequate income crisis
2. A decent home for all
3. Energy efficiency as a condition for a dequate housing
4. Efficient emergency measures for summer and winter
5. Food resilience in times of crises



Workshops

The hot air balloon exercise: What helps and hinders our advocacy?

The ropes: The challenges we face

People experiencing poverty are seldom represented in policy-making, and we often do not have enough time, funds and specialist supports to engage meaningfully. We are held back by the feeling of stress and constant emergency which comes with poverty and insecurity.

The fire: Our strengths, skills, and expertise

The personal experiences of people experiencing poverty can be good or bad, but they are always a driving force. We are resourceful and resilient and can draw on networks of families and friends, our communities and networks like this Meeting. Access to information sources and opportunities to communicate through media, particularly social media are important, as are individual contacts with politicians.



We have lived through the crisis of recent years and are passionate and motivated to change society and willing to keep going. o

The weight/sandbags: Baggage and personal circumstances that we need to let go of

We need to question ourselves and to understand that the society is us!

Poverty and racism can lead to fear, low self-esteem, and trauma. It can be hard to reconcile family responsibilities, without adequate supports, with activism, and to keep going when we see little progress and remember previous failures. We can be undermined by a lack of capacity, poor organization, and poor visibility of our work. We have little access to policy-makers and often do not dare to talk directly to them.

The weather: Factors outside of our control

Positive factors include government supports and social benefits, the recognition of social rights and the EAPN network. Against this, a wealthy minority is dominant and there is a lack of political will to change the current system. More immediately, we see the impact of wars, the recent pandemic, economic instability, climate change, and natural disasters. Other factors can vary between positive and negative from time to time, such as public opinion and the political environment.

While we can't change the weather, we can build resilience to withstand its effects

Those who cut the ropes and let us fly: The people and groups who help us

NGOs support us in advocacy, policy change and community development. Examples are older people's organisations and churches. We also rely on sympathetic media, supportive academics, families, and friends.

The most important support is the PeP.

From Demands to Change

Participant from Netherlands, said that people are under a lot of stress. Everyone needs a decent home. We must guarantee the right to affordable, inclusive and accessible housing. We need to adjust wages, minimum income and other social benefits in line with the cost of living.

Participant from Netherlands, said that most of the messages from last year's meeting are still important and relevant. We now need to go further. The system is creating problems, so we need a change in the system. Our main message to decision-makers is talk, live and work with us. If you do, we will respond.

Participant from Belgium, said that we have talked about immediate emergency measures, but we also need action to end poverty. We are willing to work with policy-makers, but you never come and ask us if your solutions work. You don't have the experience of living in poverty. If we want an inclusive EU, we have to work together and listen to each other, with everyone at the same level. Minimum wages need to be increased all over Europe. People are suffering everywhere.

Participant from Austria: We cannot afford healthy food, so we have bad health. We need to recognise the human right to quality food and clean water. Our children need free meals in kindergartens and schools, with fresh fruit and vegetables. We also need regulation of the food market. The food companies make too much profit.

Workshop participants recognised that translating policy demands into action involves community engagement, skill-building programs and advocacy. A strategy needs short-term and long-term goals. Engaging with policymakers, fostering community leadership and leveraging social media can amplify our voices. Education and awareness campaigns can garner support and break down barriers.

If we want a solution for poverty we need to work together. It is a waste of money to design policies without asking the real experts, people with experience of poverty. Policy-making needs the experience of people with lived experience of poverty. Why don't you sit down and talk to us?

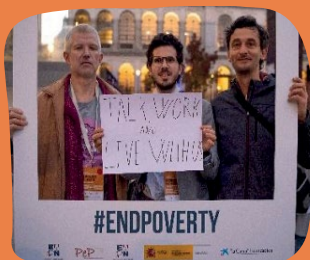
Our policy proposals need to be addressed to all levels where decisions are taken or influenced: National policy makers, the European Council, the European Parliament, ombudsmen and other networks.

EAPN should arrange meetings between policy makers and people experiencing poverty. We need to show decision-makers the reality of poverty, not just the numbers.

However, it is important to base our work on common demands, and not just talk about individual experiences, which can lead to stress, exhaustion, and depression.

4. The Visibility Action

In each delegation, participants agreed on messages related to the theme and wrote them on cards to carry in the procession to Plaza del Museo Reina Sofía at the centre of Madrid. They took the opportunity to discuss these messages with people along the way and to raise awareness about the upcoming EU elections, with our flyers. They reached out to over 200 people on the streets.



The visibility action in the Plaza del Museo Reina Sofía

YOUR VOICE, YOUR VOTE BUILDING A SOCIAL EUROPE

Voting for a Fairer Future: Your Power in 2024

WHO DOES WHAT?
In the European Union (EU),
4 bodies of governance work
in harmony:

● **THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT:**
Think of this as the people's
voice in the EU. It consists of
members directly elected by
EU citizens. They discuss,
change, and vote on new
laws and policies.

● **THE COUNCIL OF THE EU:**
It includes representatives
from each EU country. They
work together with the
European Parliament to
decide on laws. So, they
share the power to decide
what rules everyone has to
follow.

● **THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION:**
This is the team that gets
things done. They come up
with ideas for new laws and
make sure those laws are put
into action. They also make
sure that all EU countries
follow these laws consistently.

● **THE COURT OF JUSTICE OF THE EU (CJEU):**
They ensure that Member States
implement the legislation
correctly. It's only actionable by
the highest national courts. Once
CJEU, the national courts have to
follow the decision.

**SO, WHAT DO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT
HAVE TO DO WITH ALL THAT?**
Members of Parliament (MEPs) are
responsible for **discussing and voting these
policies**. They are directly voted at national
level every 5 years.

YOUR VOTE FOR SOCIAL RIGHTS!
EU policies significantly impact our daily lives.
This is why it's so crucial that we all
exercise our **Right to Vote** and be
**informed about the parties that are
willing to push for an ambitious social
agenda**, where each of us has access to:

adequate income & accessible, affordable
and quality essential services, including:
education, healthcare, housing,
transport, energy, food, water,
social services and digital tools.

When you vote for **social rights**, you are voting
for a Europe that puts **social inclusion** at its
heart and prioritises **eradicating poverty and
inequality**.

A EUROPE THAT LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND!

**EXERCISE YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE IN
JUNE 2024 AND ENCOURAGE A FAMILY
MEMBER, FRIEND, OR NEIGHBOUR TO
JOIN YOU AT THE POLLS!**

YOUR VOICE, YOUR VOTE BUILDING A SOCIAL EUROPE

EXPLORE HOW THE EU HAS SHAPED YOUR DAILY LIFE!

Imagine you, your friend or relative became a dad, you or
they can now have at least 10 days of paid paternity leave
thanks to the **WORK-LIFE BALANCE DIRECTIVE**.

If you don't have a permanent address, you should be
allowed to apply for minimum income. This is because of the **EU COUNCIL
RECOMMENDATION ON ADEQUATE MINIMUM INCOME**. It also recognises the
importance of ensuring access to essential services and other important social rights
as rights and not just as "conditions" or "tools" to get people into work.

However, EAPN recommends a Framework Directive on Minimum Income
with a common set of minimum requirements and provisions.

Through the **EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL** the EU has committed to cutting its net
greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 while ensuring a fair and
equitable transition. The **FIT FOR 55 PACKAGE** aims to achieve these climate
targets in a fair, affordable and competitive way.

EAPN strongly urges the EU to ensure that the green transition is not only
fair, but also benefits everyone, in particular low-income households. This
means integrating social aspects into all policies and ensuring they are
consistent with climate and biodiversity goals.

Every child should have the same rights, free from discrimination and intimidation.
Because of the **EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE** EU countries have committed to:
free early childhood education and care,
free education,
free healthcare,
healthy food &
adequate housing.

Scan the QR code or check the
link to access our EU elections
campaign webpage, including the
available EU Parties' manifestos.
www.eapn.eu/2024-eu-elections

EAPN

EUROPEAN AND EUROPEAN NETWORK

PeP

EAPN

EUROPEAN AND EUROPEAN NETWORK



Fundación 'la Caixa'

5. Transforming Demands into Commitments

Dialogue between people experiencing poverty and policy makers



From left to right: Maria Jacoba Vrakking, Quinta Maria Anslem, Lesley O'Reilly, João Alburquerque, Jiri Svarc, Monica Semedo, Anna Schiff and Anne Milis

Five policy-makers responded to the recommendations from the workshops and discussed how they can be progressed in the next Parliamentary and Commission terms (2024-2029).

There was a shared view that people with direct experience of poverty are excluded from many policy processes, with serious consequences for their effectiveness.

MEP Monica Semedo (Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Renew Europe Group) said that the issue of poverty was very close to her heart, from her own childhood experience. She recalled the

tough negotiations on the EU Directive on Minimum Wages. She called for more flexible parental leave, paid traineeships and universal access to quality education and jobs to break the cycle of poverty. She emphasized respect for diversity, particularly for excluded groups like Roma and people with disabilities. People have the opportunity to promote change by voting in the European elections.

MEP João Alburquerque (Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) said that the EU needs to learn how to promote active citizenship of people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. He argued for

more EU competencies in social policies, with the same level of ambition as in the economic sphere. The most urgent need is to avoid a return to the austerity policies, which failed in budgetary as well as social terms. He also advocated a European initiative on housing. Mr Albuquerque acknowledged the anger about politics. There is only one economic policy in European law and we have destroyed the foundations of the welfare state across Europe, so society is more divided. We need to break down class barriers in education and health. However, politicians are not a class apart, but representatives of the people.

MEP José Gusmão (Vice-Chair of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, Left Group) said that policies for the poor are usually poor policies. All policies must contribute to the eradication of poverty. The argument from the Right that a minimum wage would fuel unemployment and chaos was proved wrong in Portugal. Both the minimum income and minimum wage need to be increased to reflect the real cost of living. Standards are being eroded by labour market deregulation and the growth of precarious work. The unification of different strands of the European Social Fund was useful, but it is disappointing that the new fund has less resources than the previous funds combined. He argued that basic needs such as housing and energy should not be marketised. Privatization means that people are losing access to services or having to pay for basics like health and education, leaving nothing for other needs. Redistribution of wealth is needed, as the EU has seen the rise of extreme levels of wealth as well as of poverty. Housing provision should be paid for by the financial sector, which is making obscene profits. The ongoing negotiations on the Economic Governance Framework, must avoid a return to austerity policies and their consequences.

Jiri Svarc (European Commission, Head of Unit for Social Policies, Child Guarantee and the Social Protection Committee) said that the workshop

feedback resonates with the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and the discussion on the future of the Plan after 2024. There had been a generally positive response from stakeholders to the [Recommendation on Adequate Minimum Income](#), which took its inspiration from the PeP meeting and feedback from civil society. The Commission can only work within the competencies granted to it by the Treaties, which include few social policy areas. Member States have very different social systems and even different ways of measuring poverty. The responses to the COVID pandemic and the current energy crisis have been more positive than the post-2008 austerity policies, and poverty levels did not rise during this period, but we cannot be complacent. We need to find solutions to the structural causes of poverty.

The rapporteurs from the five workshops responded:

We don't ask for free things, we ask for participation in society. It feels that we are collateral damage in a crisis, just like in a war.

Anne Mills

Participation by people with experience of poverty is important because so many policy-makers are remote from their reality. You need to fight poverty with experts and we are the experts. We need a strategy which gives us the services and support to live with dignity. Coming from poverty, we have empathy that cannot be bought and we do not have greed. We need to use this in a constructive dialogue, sitting at the same table as governments and civil society, looking for solutions together. Can we be equal participants? If you want to fight on the same side as us, then we can move forward.

There is a need for more urgency, with over 95 million people in poverty. We need adequate minimum income and we need to ensure that social investment also means investing in us. Governments should be forced to take action on the housing market and healthcare. School and university should be free and accessible for everyone. All children should get free healthy meals at school, so as not to stigmatise children from low-income households.

Poverty is not just about money, it is about struggling in silence, it is about mental health, it is the shame, it is hiding this from our children, it is suicide.

Lesley O'Reilly

We can look at the example of the United States when President Roosevelt took on the billionaires and shared wealth.

We need to stop treating undocumented people as illegal.

Participants from the floor referred to a number of problems caused by poor policies: lack of cross-border harmonisation is denying some people their pension rights; digitalisation is making some purchases, and even use of toilets, impossible without a bank card, a major issue for homeless people.

Juliana Wahlgren thanked everyone for their time and their participation. She said that EAPN will provide more opportunities for people with experience of poverty to engage with policy-makers and encouraged participants to stay active throughout the year.

6. Key demands from the Workshops

1. Politicians and people with experience of poverty need to work together

The system is not working, but we are keen to help make policies more effective. Policymakers have the power to make and implement policies, and people with experience of poverty know the impact of these policies. Together, we can design meaningful and effective policies.

If politicians engage with us, more people will want to talk about poverty and remove the stigma. This is a democratic issue. Politicians have the platform to talk to everybody, including people in poverty, and not just listen to the views of companies.

However, policies are only useful if they are adequately funded, implemented and monitored.

2. Name and address the reality of poverty. Stop hiding and start helping

We need to shed light on the reality of poverty. If problems are not solved, they escalate. This can lead to general dissatisfaction, and is currently fuelling the growth of extreme right parties. If we are not satisfied, we need to mobilise and protest.

Poverty could affect anyone's children.

3. Ensure adequate minimum income, wages and benefits and increase them in line with the real cost of living

The cost-of-living crisis is forcing people to choose between essentials like food and heating. Minimum income schemes are important, but they are currently not adequate.

To fight against poverty will take less resources in the long term than not addressing it.

Increasing disposable income for low-income households leads to a better quality of life and improved health, saving public money. It also stimulates the economy, especially the local economy and small businesses, since people on low incomes spend more of their money on locally-sourced essentials like food. This in turn supports better jobs. The EU should set an adequate standard for benefits in real terms across the Union, reflecting the real cost of living and inflation in each country.

It is also important to address poverty traps, which exclude people from benefits as they cross a certain threshold. Disposable income, rather than gross income, should be taken into account in assessing eligibility for benefits.

4. Deliver adequate universal services with targeted supports for those most in need

Universal measures that benefit the whole society can build solidarity, and avoid setting rich against poor. However, universal measures alone will not be sufficient for people on lower incomes. They need to be supplemented by targeted measures for people experiencing poverty and at risk. We need to name the groups most at risk, like single mothers and children, and identify their particular needs.

Participants are also concerned by the problem of non-take-up of rights. Consumers' involvement in decision-making is important, drawing on the practical knowledge and experiences of people experiencing poverty.

5. Guarantee the right to affordable, inclusive and quality housing for all

The EU needs a binding instrument to guarantee the right to affordable, inclusive and quality housing. Investment and the supply of quality social housing should be increased, and needs to take account of the needs of different groups and individuals, such as accessibility for elderly people or people with disabilities.

Currently, people wait too long for social housing. We should use different types of housing, with ecological materials, which are quicker to build. Social housing should not be sold privately, and vacant properties should be utilised. The housing market should be regulated and the black market should be controlled. We need better management of social and emergency housing and more emergency accommodation for homeless people and those facing eviction.

6. Guarantee sufficient and affordable energy

The green transition must be just, with adequate public funding for insulation for social and rented housing, energy price caps, and supports for low-income households to compensate for increases in electricity bills due to the energy crisis. A starting point would be to reduce VAT on energy.

The lack of quality, affordable insulation is partly the result of European law, especially the Services Directive. In some countries the requirement that new houses be energy neutral has made them more expensive to rent or buy. Essential goods and services should not be subject to the market and to speculation. Energy production, distribution and pricing should move from private to public, along with the promotion of energy communities.

There should be a cap on profits and prices on certain goods and services, including energy, with exceptions only when those profits are to be re-invested.

Energy disconnections should be banned.

7. Recognise quality food and clean water as human rights

Food equals health, and many cannot afford to eat well. People who cannot access this type of nutrition are more prone to disease. Everyone should have the right to at least three healthy meals a day, and this should start with meals for children, regardless of their families' income.

Poverty could affect anyone's children.

We need to regulate markets and prices in sectors which are crucial to people's wellbeing, with greater control of profit margins and support for small producers, not just the food industry.

Strengthening local food systems is important, ensuring that everyone has access to nutritious, culturally relevant food. Part of the solution is to provide land and support for community gardens.



Participants

- Aigars Sveicers, Latvia
- Alexandra Yildiz, Austria
- Ann Milis, Belgium
- Anna Schiff, Austria
- Annie Curbelo Lang, Ireland
- Ann-Kristi Brustad, Norway
- Argyros Argyrou, Cyprus
- Aurelie Naiker, Ireland
- Blagojche Dishoski, Macedonia
- Carina Almström, Sweden
- Carmen Pamplona, Portugal
- Cidália Barriga, Portugal
- Christalla Michail Konstaninou Christalla, Cyprus
- Delphine De Riemaeker, Belgium
- Dimitar Penev, Bulgaria
- Douhomir Minev, Bulgaria
- Elida Heløy, Norway
- Eligija Šniaukštaitė, Lithuania
- István Farkas, Serbia
- Francisco Javier Ferruz Maza, Spain
- Fulvia Vannoli, Italy
- Gabriel Lungu, Romania
- Gunou Mahmoud, Netherlands
- Ines Hrga, Croatia
- Iva Kuchyňková, Czech Republic
- Ivan Malek, Slovakia
- Javier Pérez García, Spain
- Jiří Vraspír, Czech Republic
- Joelle Farrugia, Malta
- Jose Manuel González, Spain
- Josip Suton, Croatia
- Jovana Čojder, Serbia
- Juan Dario Mercere García, Spain
- Kai Hernandez Herradura, Spain
- Kari Antero Aro, Finland
- Karin Johansson, Sweden
- Karsten Dunzweiler, Germany
- Katja Rantala, Finland
- Kenneth Joseph Micallef, Malta
- Komi Michel Kakananyo, Spain
- Kristaps Zarins, Latvia
- Lars Frejborg, Sweden
- Leena Valkonen-Jusslin, Finland
- Leonor Canals Botas, Spain
- Lesley O'Reilly, Ireland
- Lou-Jayne Hamida, France
- Ľubomír Kováč, Slovakia
- Luka Todorović, Serbia
- Magdas Cristina Sanda, Italy
- Manfred Herrmann, Germany
- Mari Fe Torres, Spain
- Maria Gazi, Greece
- Maria Jacoba Vrakking, Netherlands
- Marianella Klocka, Greece
- Marija Balsevičiūtė, Lithuania
- Maxim De Jonge, Belgium
- Mirjana Soljačić, Croatia
- Miroslav Ciglian, Slovakia
- Oleg Samoilenko, Poland
- Petros Georgiou, Cyprus
- Quinta Maria Ansem, Netherlands
- Renate Antonie Krause, Germany
- Ladislav Krajdí, Czech Republic
- Ricardo Chambel, Portugal
- Robert Pakula, Poland
- Ila Mamisashvili, Spain
- Ronita Haliti, France
- Sabrina Seserman, Romania
- Santa Survila, Latvia
- Sashko Jovanov, Macedonia
- Silke Stiftinger, Austria
- Sirio Di Capua, Italy
- Thordis Viborg, Iceland
- Valentin Curcă, Romania
- Valentin Grigorov, Bulgaria



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

WWW.EAPN.EU