

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL EUROPE AFTER THE ELECTIONS

# PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY AT THE CENTER OF POLICY MAKING

#PEP2024



EAPN Report



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK



## 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.



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# 1. Executive summary

Despite the EU's overall wealth, poverty remains a significant issue, with 17.3% of the population at risk of relative income poverty and 23.5% at risk of poverty and social exclusion<sup>1</sup>. The financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures have exacerbated this problem, highlighting the need for greater awareness and effective policy responses.

The European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty (PePs) serve as a crucial platform for individuals affected by poverty to engage in decision-making processes that impact their lives.

The 22nd European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty (#PeP2024), held on June 14-15, 2024, in Brussels, aimed to connect nearly 32 national delegations with EU policymakers to address key issues such as child guarantee, digitalisation, homelessness, and minimum income.

The first day of the event was marked by several workshops providing a participatory format for people experiencing poverty to come together to discuss challenges and solutions to the four key themes relevant to PeP with delegates working in thematic groups to develop and prioritise recommendations, which were then voted upon and then presented to policymakers during a panel discussion.

This panel aimed to provide a platform for PeP delegates to directly address and discuss recommendations with EU policy makers and officials and featured prominent figures such as

Mr. Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, Mr. Jiri Svarc, Head of Unit dealing with Social Policies, Child Guarantee, and Social Protection Committee, Mr. Pablo Bustinduy Amador, Spanish Minister for Social Rights, Consumer Affairs, and 2030 Agenda, and Mr. Franck Vandenbroucke, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Affairs.

The panel discussions at #PeP2024 highlighted several key issues across multiple topics. The session on minimum income underscored the need for transparent monitoring to ensure policies effectively support dignified living standards, with Mr. Jiri Svarc advocating for increased national and EU budgetary support while stressing the importance of civil society in advancing these goals. The homelessness discussion emphasised a strategic approach integrating funding and inclusive strategies, with Mr. Svarc noting homelessness as a broader socio economic issue and Mr. Franck Vandenbroucke highlighting Belgium's commitment to translating EPSR goals into actionable policies. The Child Guarantee segment focused on addressing child poverty and discrimination through inclusive frameworks, with Olivier De Schutter advocating for balancing defense and social investments. Finally, the digitalisation panel discussed the need for digital inclusion to ensure equitable access to services, with Franck Vandenbroucke and Olivier De Schutter stressing the balance between technological advancements and preventing digital exclusion, while also addressing climate justice and social security.

The conference concluded with an agora session, a dynamic and inclusive format fostering open dialogue and active participation from all attendees. This

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat, January 2018: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)

session underscored the conference's commitment to engaging diverse voices and facilitating impactful discussions.

Overall, #PeP2024 provided a platform for robust dialogue on the interconnected issues of poverty, homelessness, child welfare, and digital inclusion. The panels and discussions emphasised the importance of evidence-based policymaking, sustainable funding mechanisms, and inclusive governance. The event concluded with a clear consensus on the need for continued collaborative action at both EU and national levels to advance social justice and build a more resilient and equitable Europe. The recommendations from the conference and this report will guide future EU policies, highlighting the critical role of ongoing engagement between policymakers, civil society, and individuals experiencing poverty.

This report summarises the main points and challenges that were highlighted during the PeP 2024 by PeP delegates.

# 2. Social and political context in Europe leading up to and since the EU elections

In the past two decades, Europe has faced a series of challenges. The 2007–2008 financial crisis, which led to an economic recession and austerity, was followed by the European debt crisis in 2010, a migration crisis in 2015 and the Brexit referendum in 2016<sup>2</sup>.

More recently, Europe was hit by COVID-19, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has resulted in a severe inflation crisis. In addition, important structural changes are ongoing: the population is ageing rapidly, challenging our social security systems and intergenerational solidarity; rapid digitalisation is changing labour markets; and the consequences of global warming are now starting to be felt on the European continent. Given these challenges, policymakers have begun worrying about the social relations that hold the EU together, partly because of the recent increase in political polarisation, the weakening of social cohesion and the increase in discontent with institutions across Europe<sup>3</sup>.

2024 has been described as an electoral year on steroids, with potential geopolitical implications for Europe's role nationally and internationally. These have been the first European elections since Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and conflicts in Ukraine and in the Middle East that have polarised Europe. The PeP 2024 event, held against this backdrop, highlights the significance of these elections for shaping policies that will directly impact the lives of those experiencing poverty across Europe.

Over the past two decades, Europe has seen a rise in political polarisation and populism, a trend that manifests, in part, through anti-establishment attitudes and, in some cases, a drift towards authoritarian rule. Several indicators suggest that trust in national establishments and institutions has eroded, which is usually accompanied by increased discontent. As stated in the french national report, what emerges is a perception that "only the extremist parties seem to understand and represent the realities experienced by these people". This "feeling of abandonment" is exacerbated by the lack of concrete solutions adapted to their daily needs.

This polarisation and distrust among European residents has led to Europe becoming a breeding ground for populist and Eurosceptic parties to explore a host of fracturing topics that are likely

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2 The political dimension of social cohesion in Europe, Eurofound: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-04/ef23012en.pdf>

3 Idem

to be magnified by disinformation, misinformation and deep fakes, possibly boosted by Artificial Intelligence.

The gradual shift of global politics from a predominant model of cooperation to one of competition, confrontation, or even conflict has continued in 2024 with grave implications on the lives of people living in Europe. An increasing propensity towards buffering security budgets and push backs of people seeking safety and asylum has meant cutting already limited and vital social aid structures that have increasingly been failing Europeans, especially those most marginalised by Europe's historical and ongoing policies of exclusion.

Similarly geo-political tensions such as the war with Russia and a lack of foresight and investment in green energy alternatives has meant that even more people in Europe have ended up without energy due to the skyrocketing costs or having to choose between energy and other necessities such as food or shelter.

Many of our national networks mentioned the correlation between these crises and the increase in precariousness and the number of people affected in their country. In Croatia, for example, one of the PePs mentioned this increase, and linked it to the growing distrust of the public authorities: *"First there was the war, then one thing, then another, then the recession, then there was this, then there was that, then there was a pandemic, then Ukraine, then the euro, then Gaza... And they always say that we are in a crisis, that it will get better. So far, it hasn't happened, so I don't believe it will happen soon. I stopped convincing myself. There will always be a crisis, but when improving the living conditions of citizens is not their priority - then they have to blame something else, not themselves."*

This observation was also reflected in the results of the European elections. The aftershocks of the June elections are still reverberating across the continent after some of Europe's most prominent leaders

suffered setbacks. Meanwhile, right-wing and far-right parties made significant gains, though failed to achieve the results polls had predicted, with two important exceptions<sup>4</sup>.

For EAPN's network, framing the discussions in the aftermath of the European elections has been of critical importance. The PeP meeting provided a vital platform for receiving immediate feedback on how the results of the European Parliament elections are impacting the most vulnerable communities facing poverty.

It also served as an opportunity to gather input for shaping the EU's forthcoming social agenda. While these elections are often perceived through the lens of national politics and protest votes, it is crucial to recognise that many of the challenges we face daily can only be addressed through a strong, resilient, and socially just European Union. In light of the new balance of power in the European Parliament, it is more important than ever to work collectively rather than in isolation to confront the issues that affect all Europeans. These issues include building a fair economy that leaves no one behind, tackling the climate crisis, and managing migration with a firm commitment to human rights.

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<sup>4</sup> EU elections 2024: Who won and lost – and what happens next? <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/06/european-parliament-elections-eu-brussels-2024/>

# 3. PEP2024: Purpose, USP and format

In spite of the overall wealth of the European Union (EU), poverty in the EU is still at a relatively high level and rapidly increasing, with 17.3% of the EU-28 population, that is almost 87 million people, at risk of relative income poverty and more than 118 million people or 23.5 % of the EU-28 population at risk of poverty and social exclusion – whether being at risk of relative poverty, severely materially deprived or living in a household with very low work intensity<sup>5</sup>.

The financial crisis, but even more so the response to the crisis through austerity measures, have clearly generated more poverty. However, the extent and seriousness of the problem is often not well understood either by policy makers or the general public.

## USP

This is why events and dialogue avenues such as these annual European PeP events are crucial to bridging the gap between the people most marginalised in Europe as a result of historical systems of exclusion and the policy makers who make decisions that directly impact the lives and livelihoods of people experiencing poverty.

The European Anti-Poverty Network is the only organisation known in Europe to organise events annually that not only include PeP but where PeP are the main stakeholders driving the event. PeP both set

the objectives in terms of the format of the annual PeP events as well as define recommendations for policy makers that are identified at these event. This is why PePs have grown in relevance and been singled out as a key event in the inclusion of PeP to advocate on their own behalf.

The EAPN's People Experiencing Poverty (PeP) meetings are unique and crucial for several reasons such as:

### 1. Direct Involvement of People with Lived Experience

Amplifying Marginalised Voices: PeP Meetings prioritise the voices of people who have direct, lived experience of poverty. This approach ensures that the perspectives and realities of those most affected by poverty are heard and integrated into the policy-making process. Unlike many conferences that only involve policymakers, academics, and NGOs, PeP Meetings actively involve those who live the reality of poverty daily.

Strengthening Advocacy Skills: By participating in these meetings, individuals also develop skills in advocacy, public speaking, and policy engagement, which can have long-lasting benefits beyond the event itself.

### 2. Influence on Policy

Shaping Policy from the Ground Up: PeP Meetings serve as a bridge between people experiencing poverty and those who design policies affecting them. The insights and recommendations generated during these meetings are often used to inform EAPN's advocacy work, which in turn influences

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<sup>5</sup> Eurostat, January 2018: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)



European and national policies on poverty and social inclusion.

**Practical Solutions:** The input from participants often leads to practical, grounded solutions that might otherwise be overlooked by those without direct experience of poverty. This makes policies more effective and relevant to those they are intended to help.

### **3. Humanising Policy Discourse**

**Personalising the Debate:** The presence of people experiencing poverty at these meetings humanises the policy discourse, shifting it from abstract discussions about numbers and trends to a focus on real human lives. This personal connection can be powerful in influencing policymakers who may otherwise be disconnected from the day-to-day realities of poverty.

**Countering Stereotypes:** By showcasing the voices and experiences of people in poverty, PeP Meetings challenge stereotypes and misconceptions, promoting a more nuanced understanding of poverty that goes beyond simplistic or stigmatising narratives.

### **4. Promoting Social Justice and Inclusion**

**Ethical Imperative:** Involving people experiencing poverty directly in the conversation is an ethical imperative aligned with principles of social justice and human rights. It recognises the dignity and worth of every individual, ensuring that those who are often marginalised have a seat at the table.

**Fostering Inclusion:** The meetings promote social inclusion by breaking down barriers between different social groups and fostering dialogue that includes everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

### **5. Sustaining Momentum and Awareness**

**Raising Awareness:** These annual meetings help to maintain a high level of awareness about poverty issues among stakeholders, media, and the broader public.

**Creating a Movement:** By regularly convening these meetings, EAPN contributes to building a movement that continually pushes for better policies and greater social inclusion, ensuring that the fight against poverty remains a priority on the European agenda.

## Purpose

The European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty or PePs contribute to the right of people living in poverty to participate in and access information relating to the decision-making processes that affect their lives and well-being. The European meeting is the most visible point in the process of fostering this but perhaps even more important is the fact that they act as a catalyst for national participation processes.

PePs are a key annual platform that present an opportunity to make the voices of people experiencing poverty heard, to connect with politicians and decision-makers, inform policy-making processes at the European level about the impact of the cost of living crisis on people's lives and to strengthen networks between entities and people throughout Europe.

The work that goes into them at the local, regional and national level is the most concrete expression of one of EAPN's key values - that people experiencing poverty have the right to influence and participate in decisions that affect them and to have their views and experiences listened to and acted upon.

On 14-15 June 2024, the 22nd European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty (#PeP2024), organised by the European Anti-Poverty Network with the support of the European Commission and under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU, took place at the Nhow Hotel in Brussels, Belgium.

The 2024 edition brought together almost 100 participants, including national delegations of people experiencing poverty from 23 countries and national and European policy makers.

At the La Hulpe Conference, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Belgian Presidency on behalf of the 25 EU Member States, the European Economic and Social Committee, ETUC, SGI Europe, SME United and Social Platform

were joint signatories to a declaration on the future of the European Social Rights Base. Through this declaration, these parties committed to continuing the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and to strengthening social Europe.

Taking into account the political recommendations of the La Hulpe declaration, the foundation of the PeP 2024 event was guided by the priorities identified by the Belgian Presidency as essential for the future of the European social agenda. Based on these identified priorities, the event's methodology provided discussion tools focused on the four main themes explored as essential for the future of social Europe, namely:

- **EU Child guarantee**
- **Digitalisation**
- **Homelessness and**
- **Minimum income**

Taking place right at the beginning of a new term of the European Commission and Parliament, the meeting came together at an important moment and gave an excellent opportunity to people experiencing poverty to speak up and present their political priorities to the new leadership of our European institutions in these four key areas.

The 22nd edition of the meeting was titled "Shaping the future of social Europe after the elections: People Experiencing Poverty at the center of policy-making".

The design of the meeting was highly participatory in order to enable people with direct experience of poverty to work together and to develop key demands and messages that they wanted policy makers to hear and act on.

## Conference format

During the morning of the first day on 14 June, participants were divided into thematic groups, called 'expert groups'. Each national delegation could choose 2 themes from the identified priority themes: child guarantee, digitalisation,

homelessness and minimum income. They then joined the other delegations who also chose these themes for two phases of work and discussion.

For this first step in round 1, participants started by sharing their experiences, to make the link with the collective ambitions on a European scale. The group diagnosed the chosen theme, while identifying the priority issues and the major challenges linked to the theme. This exercise was used as a power mapping exercise, to identify the resources and means available to PeP to achieve these priority objectives, as well as the obstacles and potential challenges to success.

In round 2, after identifying the priority issues, the participants continued the power mapping by defining the means and resources needed to achieve these priority objectives, as well as the potential challenges and obstacles to their success. This stage was also an opportunity to refine their demands into recommendations, specifying their timeframe, the legislative or regulatory instruments invoked and the recipients of the proposed measures.

During the voting phase in the afternoon on 14 June, each expert group that met in the morning met again to designate its representative for the panel discussion. They then proceeded to the voting phase where they voted for the recommendations that they considered to be priorities at the European level.

Once each expert group has expressed their opinion, a general vote was held, where participants per group were invited to vote on the issues that they had worked on during the day, in order to obtain an overall barometer of the PePs on the proposed themes and issues, which were then shared with policy-makers at European level.

On day 2, EAPN sought to put those affected back at the heart of the discussion. Taking inspiration from the direct democracy of ancient Greece, an Agora was held: a public space where a group of citizens can freely express their ideas and actions.

Each national delegation then reported on its good practices and lessons learned at thePeP meeting, and the assembly was able to coordinate its European ambitions to ensure that PeP and their demands are better represented in policy-making.



# 4. Opening Ceremony

At the start of the PeP 2024 conference, one of PeP's delegates and the MC for the opening, Anne warmly welcomed the delegates in multiple EU languages, emphasising their crucial role in shaping policy recommendations. She explained that the conference focuses on four key topics, aiming to influence governmental agendas directly through clear, actionable recommendations from participants.

Juliana, Secretary General of EAPN, highlighted the urgency of initiating campaigns for change immediately, stressing the need to challenge and discomfort policymakers. The session, meticulously prepared since February, aimed for smooth proceedings with inclusive facilitation.

Léna Ndoye, Participation & Development Officer at EAPN, presented the participation guidelines, introducing trusted facilitators and addressing accessibility needs, such as ensuring visibility for delegates with disabilities and accommodating specific requirements like meal delivery.



# 5. Thematic workshop Sessions

## Key Messages, Challenges, Solutions, and Recommendations

During the second part of the day, participants joined workshops focusing on the 4 key thematic priorities affecting people experiencing poverty. The purpose of these interactive workshops was for PeP delegates to exchange ideas and discuss the most pressing issues identified during national preparations. There were 8 workshops covering 4 topics: two on the EU Child guarantee, two on Digitalisation, two on Homelessness and two on Minimum income.

In the first round of workshops, delegates started by sharing their experiences, to make the link with the collective ambitions on a European scale. The group

diagnosed the chosen theme, while identifying the priority issues and the major challenges linked to the theme.

After identifying the priority issues, in the second round of workshops the participants continued the power mapping by defining the means and resources needed to achieve these priority objectives, as well as the potential challenges and obstacles to their success.

Read a summary of the key challenges, solutions and recommendations from these workshops by theme on the following pages.



### a. EU Child Guarantee Policy:

In the panel discussion on the EU Child Guarantee Policy, a poignant statement by Sara from Belgium set the tone: “Even if you have food, or a house, you still have the right to be a child. You still need safe spaces, to play with others and discover the world and not be excluded.” This message underscores the reality that material provisions alone are not enough to secure a child's well-being.

Despite the EU's position as the world's second-largest economy, the reality for many children is starkly different. Recent data reveal that one in four children within the EU is at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The current cost-of-living crisis, exacerbated by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, has only deepened the struggles of many EU households, leaving them with barely enough to cover basic needs.

In response, the EU has introduced the Child Guarantee, an ambitious plan aimed at addressing child poverty by 2030. This policy requires EU governments to ensure that children facing social exclusion have guaranteed access to education, daily

school meals, healthcare, and housing. However, as this workshop revealed, the implementation of this policy is fraught with challenges.

During the workshop, delegates shared firsthand experiences of the difficulties faced by children at risk of poverty and social exclusion. These accounts highlighted the pervasive exclusion and stigma that children from impoverished backgrounds endure, which often lead to bullying, mental health issues, and poor educational outcomes. Economic hardships were also a central theme, with families—particularly single parents and marginalised groups like Roma and with a migration background—struggling to meet basic needs such as paying bills and providing adequate food. The discussions also pointed to the inadequacies of current support systems, which are often hampered by bureaucratic barriers and discrimination, failing to meet the complex needs of families in poverty.

The key messages from the workshop emphasised the necessity of a holistic approach to tackling child poverty. Delegates stressed that children's rights must be at the forefront of any policy, with



a particular focus on ensuring that children can play, discover, and learn without the burden of poverty. Universal measures, such as free school meals, were advocated to prevent stigmatisation, with the sentiment that “quality and inclusivity are essential.” Moreover, it was clear that child poverty is deeply intertwined with the socio-economic conditions of their parents; therefore, improving parental circumstances is crucial for the well-being of children.

Discrimination, too, was a recurrent theme, with a strong call to combat poverty stigma, racism, and other intersectional injustices. Delegates argued that ending discrimination is vital for providing effective support and empowerment to children and their families.

There was a clear call for comprehensive support systems for families, based on respect and empowerment rather than charity.

Food security was highlighted as a fundamental aspect of a child’s well-being, with a focus on ensuring access to healthy, affordable, and quality

food both in and out of school.

The workshop sessions ultimately underscored the urgent need for a multifaceted approach to tackling child poverty in the EU. By addressing both immediate needs and structural issues, and by ensuring that policies are inclusive, respectful, and empowering, the EU can make significant progress towards fulfilling the goals of the Child Guarantee policy. As one delegate aptly concluded, “We must create a future where every child can thrive, regardless of their socio-economic background.”

#### **Recommendations from policy makers:**

- 1 **PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT FOR PARENTS** - not charity and pity, but empowerment and resources (minimum income, housing, healthcare etc).
- 2 **STOP DISCRIMINATION** - end stigma against people experiencing poverty and combat intersectional discrimination of both children and parents; “child poverty” stigmatises parents.
- 3 **PROMOTE A CHILD RIGHTS - BASED APPROACH** - placing children’s wellbeing at the center, for all children, including the right to play, explore, socialise, and thrive.
- 4 **ENSURE FOOD SECURITY** for children and parents, in and out of school - healthy, nutritious, accessible, quality, appropriate (halal, allergies etc) food.

## b. Digitalisation:

The EU has taken significant strides in positioning itself as a global leader in tech regulation, enacting several key legislative measures to ensure transparency and accountability in the digital sphere. The Digital Services Act (DSA) represents a landmark regulation, establishing crucial guidelines for internet platforms like Meta, Google, and X across the EU. Furthermore, the upcoming AI Act aims to govern the use of artificial intelligence, embedding important rights protections into its framework.

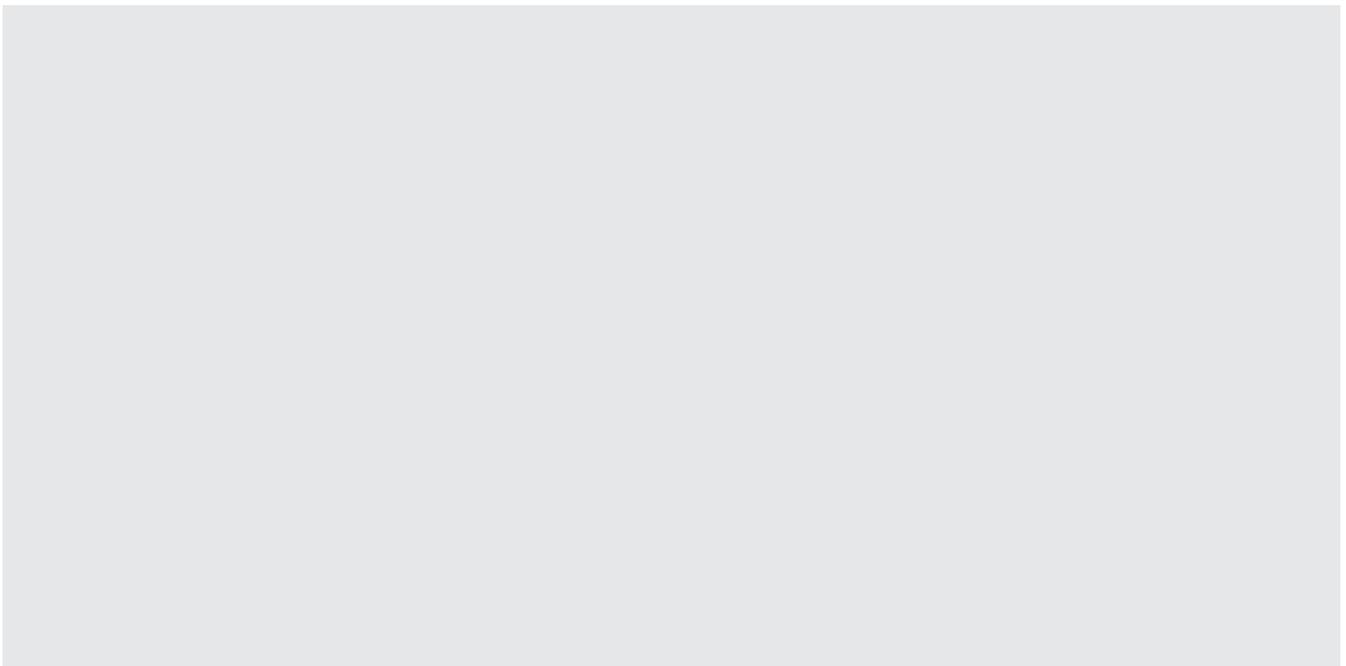
However, despite these advancements, many argue that these new regulations represent only a baseline—floors, not ceilings. While the DSA has made strides in regulating tech companies, it falls short in addressing the pervasive surveillance of users. The AI Act, too, contains loopholes, particularly in ensuring transparency and accountability when AI is deployed in sensitive areas such as law enforcement and migration.

The discussion on these challenges was brought to the fore during this workshop on digitalisation. Here, participants delved into the significant hurdles faced

by people experiencing poverty (PeP) as society becomes increasingly digital. The accessibility and inclusivity of digital services emerged as paramount concerns.

One of the primary challenges discussed was the digital divide, which disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, including those without home internet access. For individuals like the unhoused, who lack basic access to phones or the internet, digital services become virtually inaccessible, exacerbating their exclusion. Furthermore, the complexity and usability of digital platforms pose additional barriers, particularly for those who are not digitally literate. Even when online services are available, they are often poorly designed and not widely known, making them difficult to use for those most in need.

Language barriers further complicate access to digital services, especially for non-native speakers who struggle to find information in their language. The shift towards digital services has also resulted in the loss of personal contact, which is crucial for individuals requiring complex support or those



in distress. This loss of human interaction was highlighted as a significant drawback, particularly in situations where personal connection and empathy are vital.

Throughout the workshop, delegates stressed the need for a balanced approach to digitalisation—one that enhances accessibility without creating new obstacles. There was a strong call for inclusivity in digital services, with an emphasis on making them available in multiple formats, whether digital, physical, or telephonic. The importance of choice and autonomy was also underscored, with participants advocating for the option to use or not use digital services based on individual preference. Moreover, robust support and training systems were deemed essential to help people navigate digital platforms effectively. Social workers, in particular, were identified as key figures who should be trained to assist with digital needs and provide comprehensive information on users' rights.

Access to technology was another critical issue raised, with participants stressing that having access to hardware (such as smartphones and computers)

and the internet is a basic need and right. Concerns about privacy and security were also prominent, with a call for secure digital tools that include easily accessible online security measures.

#### **Recommendations to policy makers:**

1. **We want digitalisation as an optional**, inclusive tool, side by side with low threshold, easy accessible, high quality non-digital access options (face -to-face, phone, paper).
2. **Access to the necessary tools** (hardware / software / internet) is a basic right and should be guaranteed
3. **Digital platforms should be made accessible** and easy to use and understand for people with disabilities and low literacy and non native speakers
4. **Social workers should be well trained** in the use of digital tools, in offering help to access those, have a comprehensive knowledge of the existing rights and how to aid people in vulnerable situations

### c. Homelessness

During the workshop sessions addressing homelessness, one participant shared some alarming figures: 20% of Austria's population lives in poverty, and homelessness is a potential fate for anyone.

The housing crisis in Austria, as in much of Europe, has been significantly aggravated by investors purchasing properties not to live in or rent out affordably but to drive up prices for profit. This speculation has made housing increasingly unaffordable for ordinary people, pushing many into precarious living situations. Compounding this issue is the glaring deficiency of social housing programs, which should serve as a safety net but are woefully inadequate in meeting the growing demand.

Another critical challenge discussed was the ease with which individuals can lose their homes due to financial hardships. The difficulty of repaying loans, coupled with banks' readiness to evict at the first sign of trouble, leaves many vulnerable, with inadequate legal protections to prevent such evictions.

Accessibility issues further exacerbate the situation,

with the processes required to secure housing, shelters, and income support being so complex that many people simply fall through the cracks. Emergency housing programs, while helpful, are often temporary and conditional, leaving individuals exposed once these programs end. The plight of the working poor was also highlighted, with the recognition that many people who are employed still cannot afford housing due to inadequate wages, undermining the idea that a job alone is a ticket out of poverty.

A particularly vulnerable group discussed were individuals leaving institutions such as prisons, orphanages, or medical facilities. Without support or guidance on how to secure housing, many of these individuals end up on the streets, creating a vicious cycle of homelessness that is difficult to escape. This situation is worsened by a deep distrust that exists between unhoused individuals and the institutions that are supposed to help them, further alienating those in need from the support structures available.

Throughout the sessions, a clear message emerged: politicians must take responsibility for the housing crisis rather than blaming individuals for



systemic failures. Housing needs to be recognised as a fundamental human right, with comprehensive social policies put in place to support this right. Addressing homelessness requires a significant shift in both policies and attitudes at national and European levels, with the development of inclusive policies that incorporate the voices of those directly affected by homelessness.

Prevention and protection must be at the forefront of any strategy, with proactive measures to prevent homelessness and safeguard renters from exploitation.

To combat homelessness effectively, the sessions proposed several key solutions. One of the primary recommendations was the development of a comprehensive European strategy on homelessness, backed by a dedicated fund.

Another crucial aspect of the solution lies in the meaningful participation of people living in poverty in the policy-making process. Their involvement in designing, implementing, and evaluating policies ensures that the measures taken are practical and effective.

Additionally, there was a strong call to focus on supporting individuals leaving institutions, helping them access housing and secure their rights, thus preventing them from becoming homeless.

Regulating the private housing market was also deemed essential, with recommendations to implement protections for renters and control rental prices to make housing more affordable.

The sessions also emphasised the need to bring empty houses back into use to increase the availability of affordable and social housing. Discrimination in social housing must be eliminated, and universal services should be provided to assist with rent payments, ensuring that all individuals have access to secure and dignified housing.

The discussions concluded with a clear understanding that addressing homelessness requires a coordinated and sustained effort at all levels, with a focus on both prevention and long-term solutions to ensure that everyone has access to safe, affordable housing.

#### **Recommendations to policy makers:**

1. **Have a European strategy on homelessness** that goes beyond the Lisbon principals on the base of the child guarantee with a fund attached created with people living in poverty and homeless people.
2. **Participation of people experiencing poverty in the discussions** around housing and every topic that concerns them so they can bring their knowledge and good practices.
3. **Regulate the private market** to ensure greater protection for renters.
4. **Regulate evictions** for everyone by creating a right to housing and to the place you live.
5. **Ensure empty houses are brought back on stream** to ensure additional affordable and social housing.
6. **Having a special focus on people leaving institutions** to access their rights (especially housing).
7. **Prevent discrimination** by stopping stigmatisation through social housing and create a service open to everybody to help people paying their rent.

#### **d. Minimum income:**

During the workshops on minimum income, a recurring theme was the urgent need for policies that go beyond mere survival and ensure that people can live with dignity. The discussions revealed the inadequacies of current minimum income levels across many countries, where the financial support provided falls short of covering basic necessities like childcare, housing, and food. This shortfall forces many individuals and families into a daily struggle to make ends meet.

The challenges faced by ethnic minorities and migrants were a significant focus, with participants highlighting the pervasive barriers and discrimination these groups encounter when trying to access minimum income and social benefits. Ethnic minorities, particularly the Roma community, often find themselves marginalised by systems that are supposed to support them, leading to persistent poverty despite the availability of EU funding meant to alleviate their plight. The frustration was palpable among delegates who argued that without consulting the affected communities, these funds fail to bring about meaningful improvements.

Another critical issue discussed was the harsh conditionality attached to social benefits. In many cases, individuals are required to meet stringent conditions—such as proving their unemployment status or accepting low-quality jobs—just to receive minimal support. This approach not only stigmatises those in need but also fails to address the root causes of poverty.

The economic pressures of inflation and rising living costs have only deepened the crisis, pushing more people below the poverty line, even among those who are employed. The inadequacy of social support systems was starkly highlighted, particularly for vulnerable groups like single mothers, the elderly, and students, who often find themselves neglected by policies that do not account for their specific needs.

The workshop also emphasised the importance of recognising the right to an adequate income, one that reflects the true cost of living and enables individuals to meet their basic needs with dignity. This right must be enshrined in policies that are inclusive and non-discriminatory, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity, location, or background, have equal access to the support they need.

Delegates called for the removal of strict conditionality from social benefits, advocating instead for systems that provide support without imposing unnecessary barriers.

A "Housing First" approach was proposed as a crucial element of social policy, particularly in light of how inflation has exacerbated poverty. By prioritising stable housing, individuals can gain a foundation upon which they can build the rest of their lives, including accessing other social benefits and improving their overall well-being.

Finally, the discussions underscored the importance of involving those who are directly affected by poverty in the policymaking process.

**Recommendations for policy makers:**

1. **EAPN has always advocated for a directive on minimum income**, we now have a recommendation. We ask for a transparent and effective monitoring of the implementation of the recommendation. If no concrete progress is made, a directive should be reconsidered.
2. **European decision makers should better understand** the situation of people experiencing poverty in order to develop more effective policies. We ask for more training for politicians on poverty and what it actually means to live with a very small budget. This should be done together with people experiencing poverty.
3. **Poverty, and in particular minimum income, should be a priority** in the new EU budget.
4. **The budgetary obligations** of the EU will have as a consequence that states have made budget cuts. Cuts on minimum income should be avoided at all costs. We therefore ask for an exception for minimum income in the budgetary rules.
5. **There should be more exchanges between countries** on minimum income so that they can learn from each other what works and what doesn't. People experiencing poverty should be involved in these exchanges and be able to propose themes for exchange.
6. **Living a life of dignity doesn't only depend on minimum income**, but is also connected to housing, education, quality work, and health. We need an overarching European anti-poverty strategy that takes all aspects into account.

# 6. Voted recommendations per theme

In the next session of the day PeP delegates met back at the plenary to vote on the final recommendations per thematic. This process was done digitally after each group's spokesperson briefly introduced each recommendation. A more inclusive voting system done electronically via QR codes was tried for the first time to ensure a more participative and democratic process.

Only PeP delegates that had participated in the respective thematic workshops were invited to vote for the recommendation for that theme, due to time restraint. This was criticised by some delegates who had expected and would have preferred to have been able to vote on all of the recommendations and not be limited to voting only on a few of the key themes.

The highest voted recommendations per theme were:

## A. Child Guarantee:

1. Stop the war: no money for weapons instead of social policies, including child policies
2. Comprehensive support for parents: no charity but empowerment.
3. Stop discrimination: stigma around poverty, including child poverty + intersectional discrimination for parents and children.

## B. Digitalisation:

1. We want digitalisation as an optional, inclusive tool, side by side with low threshold, easy accessible, high quality non-digital access options (face -to-face, phone, paper).



2. Digital platforms should be made accessible and easy to use and understand for people with disabilities and low literacy and non native speakers.

### **C. Homelessness:**

1. Have a European strategy on combating homelessness that goes beyond the Lisbon principals. This strategy should be attached to a fund for implementation. To access it, every country should present national plans monitored by the European commission. People living in poverty and people with lived experience of homelessness need to be included in developing the national plans, the implementation, the monitoring and the evaluation of the strategy.
2. Demand the effective and meaningful participation of people living in poverty and with lived experience of homelessness in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all policies that may affect them, through institutionalised and appropriate mechanisms and processes.
3. Ensure that people leaving institutions (mental health clinics, prison, orphanage and so on) are prepared to safely go back to society and exercise their rights.

### **D. Minimum Income:**

1. European decision makers should better understand the situation of people experiencing poverty in order to develop more effective policies. We ask for more training for politicians on poverty and what it actually means to live with a very small budget. This should be done together with people experiencing poverty.
2. Living a life of dignity doesn't only depend on minimum income, but is also connected to housing, education, quality work, and health. We need an overarching European anti-poverty strategy that takes all aspects into account.

# 7. Panel with policy makers: Overview and outcomes

Day 1 ended with a panel discussion that brought together several high profile policy makers and the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty. The panel was meant to serve as a space for the discussions and recommendations that were voted on by the PeP to be shared and discussed with the invited panellists.

The panel was facilitated jointly by Laura Sullivan & Maxime de Jonge and included:

1. **Mr Olivier De Schutter**, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty
2. **Mr. Jiri Svarc**, Head of Unit dealing with Social Policies, Child Guarantee and Social protection Committee and Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
3. **Mr Pablo Bustinduy Amador**, Spanish Minister for Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and 2030 Agenda (Video intervention)
4. **Mr Franck Vandenbroucke**, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Affairs

Here are some of the main insights from each panel discussion at #PeP2024, including the discussions that unfolded:

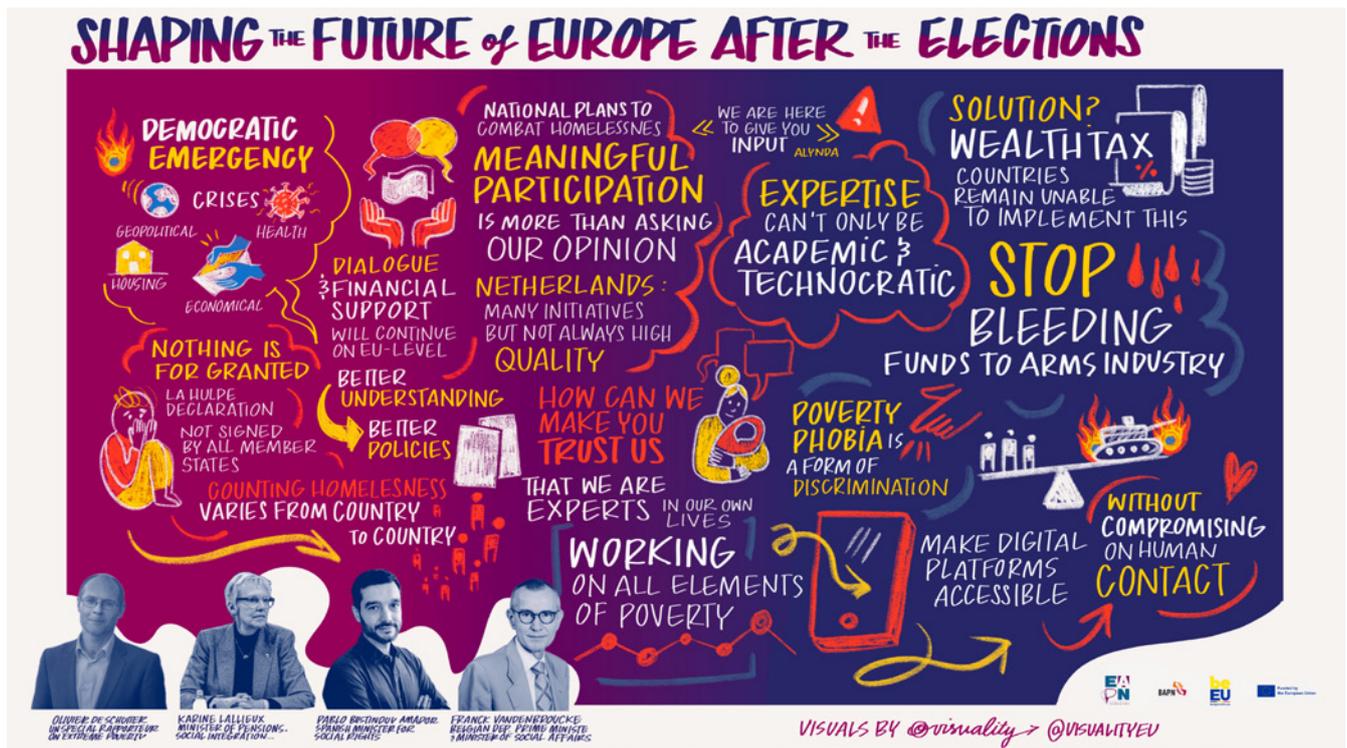
## Panel 1: Minimum Income

The discussion on the Minimum Income policy began with a presentation by Alynda Mammen from the Dutch delegation, who emphasised the necessity of ensuring that minimum income policies guarantee a life of dignity for all. Alynda stressed the importance of transparent and robust monitoring mechanisms, which are crucial to tracking the effectiveness of

existing policies in reducing poverty and ensuring that basic needs, such as housing and healthcare, are adequately met.

Responding to Alynda, Jiri Svarc, the Head of Unit dealing with Social Policies, Child Guarantee and Social protection Committee and Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, acknowledged the European Union's ongoing pilot projects on minimum income as a positive step. However, he pointed out that these initiatives have had limited reach across the Member States, emphasising the need for stronger national commitments and greater EU budgetary support to tackle poverty on a larger scale. Mr. Svarc argued that social investments, including those aimed at poverty reduction, yield significant long-term benefits for both individuals and society.

During the panel, a question arose about the future of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and the potential renewal of its Action Plan in light of the changing political landscape. In response, Mr. Svarc acknowledged the uncertainty surrounding the EPSR's continuity due to upcoming political appointments and shifting priorities. Despite these uncertainties, he maintained that it would be politically unwise to retreat from the ambitious goals set forth by the EPSR. He also highlighted the indispensable role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in advocating for and contributing to these social rights goals, stressing the ongoing efforts to maintain dialogue and support for people experiencing poverty (PeP) through such organisations.



When addressing concerns about the enforcement of these policies, Mr. Svarc explained the EU's approach, which involves bilateral discussions and leveraging economic arguments to persuade Member States to view poverty reduction measures not as costs, but as investments in their societies. Both Mr. Svarc and the PeP delegates emphasised the importance of collaboration with civil society, particularly the efforts made during the COVID-19 pandemic, to shape effective policy recommendations.

The discussion concluded with a strong consensus on the need for sustained EU funding and improved coordination between EU institutions and Member States to implement and monitor minimum income policies effectively.

The discussion ended with a shared commitment to fostering political will at both the EU and national levels to advance these crucial social policies.

## Panel 2: Homelessness

During this panel discussion, the critical importance of strategic funding and inclusive implementation in addressing homelessness was emphasised. Luc Van

de Meulenhof from the Dutch delegation presented key recommendations, advocating for a strategic approach that integrates funding with inclusive implementation strategies. He underscored the need to address structural factors like housing affordability and accessibility to effectively tackle homelessness.

Responding to this, Mr. Svarc acknowledged the complexity of homelessness as a symptom of broader socio economic challenges, such as poverty and inadequate social housing policies across EU Member States. He highlighted EU initiatives like the European Platform for Homelessness Cooperation (EPOCH) and pilot projects aimed at innovative solutions to homelessness.

PeP delegates, representing those experiencing poverty, validated the authenticity of their experiences and stressed the importance of their active participation in shaping policies. They expressed concerns about the future priorities of the EU's social pillar declaration and emphasised the need for continued engagement.

Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister, Franck Vandenberghe, discussed Belgium's commitment

to social policy, particularly during its presidency, and emphasised the translation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) into concrete actions and policies that effectively reduce poverty. He mentioned the La Hulpe Declaration as an effort to maintain social rights at the forefront of EU policy-making and highlighted the invaluable expertise of those experiencing poverty in informing these policies. He also discussed the importance of integrating care systems to support vulnerable mothers, reflecting Belgium's commitment to implementing child guarantees.

Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, emphasised the need for inclusive decision-making processes that empower people facing economic insecurity. He expressed concerns about the rise of far-right sentiments and highlighted the role of macroeconomic policies in effectively addressing poverty.

PeP delegates presented recommendations, including redirecting funds from defence budgets to enhance social security and focusing on affordable housing and combating housing segregation, which perpetuates intergenerational poverty. The discussions also addressed systemic issues like discrimination against those in poverty and the need for comprehensive legislative measures to combat this stigma.

The panel concluded with a consensus on the need for increased EU support for innovative approaches to homelessness prevention and intervention. There was a strong emphasis on the importance of data-driven policymaking and cross-sectoral collaboration across all levels of governance to effectively address homelessness and poverty.

### **Panel 3: Child Guarantee**

During the Child Guarantee panel discussion, the focus was on the importance of the Child Guarantee in addressing child poverty and combating discrimination and stigma affecting vulnerable children across Europe. A PeP delegate highlighted

the need for inclusive policy frameworks that prioritise child welfare, ensuring that all children have access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and adequate nutrition.

Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, emphasised the economic benefits of investing in social security systems to support families and reduce child poverty. He argued that such investments not only improve the lives of children but also contribute to social cohesion and inclusive growth across the EU. De Schutter also expressed concerns about the prioritisation of defence spending over social investments, highlighting how this imbalance can hinder efforts to alleviate poverty. He stressed the importance of access to affordable housing as a critical factor in poverty reduction and called for equal treatment of those in poverty, similar to efforts against racism, pointing out systemic biases in employment and housing.

Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Franck Vandenbroucke echoed the importance of solidarity in addressing global crises like the war in Ukraine while ensuring that domestic poverty and social security needs are not neglected. He acknowledged that defence spending is a significant political issue but emphasised the need to find additional resources without compromising essential social services like education and healthcare. Vandenbroucke also discussed efforts to simplify and integrate support systems for vulnerable groups, particularly single pregnant mothers, through collaborative EU negotiations and local initiatives in Belgium.

The discussion highlighted the intersectionality of global security, domestic welfare, and social justice, with PeP delegates emphasising the need to combat discrimination and stigma against those in poverty. De Schutter's insights into the long-term benefits of social investments underscored the importance of sustainable and inclusive growth.

The panel concluded with a consensus on the need for continued EU commitment to the Child



Guarantee, advocating for multi-stakeholder partnerships and evidence-based policymaking to achieve sustainable outcomes for children and families. The discussion underscored the critical need for inclusive policies that prioritise human needs over military expenditures, ensuring that all children in the EU can grow up in a safe and supportive environment.

#### Panel 4: Digitalisation

In the panel discussion on digitalisation, the conversation opened with a focus on the challenges of digital inclusion, particularly for marginalised communities. A PeP delegate underscored the importance of ensuring that digital tools are accessible to all citizens, highlighting their role in improving service delivery and fostering social inclusion across Europe.

Franck Vandenbroucke and Olivier De Schutter explored the potential of digital technologies to enhance access to social services, while also

warning of the risks posed by digital exclusion. They stressed that while digitalisation can streamline and improve the efficiency of service delivery, it must be implemented in a way that prioritises inclusivity. The importance of cybersecurity was also highlighted, with both panellists noting that robust measures are necessary to protect privacy and shield vulnerable populations from digital threats.

PeP delegates recommended making digital tools more inclusive by ensuring they are accessible to disadvantaged communities, including those without reliable electricity or who are at risk of cyber threats. They also advocated for subsidies to make necessary digital tools affordable and suggested maintaining non-digital alternatives, like postal services or phone access, for those unable to use digital platforms. Additionally, they called for digital platforms to be user-friendly, especially for people with disabilities, non-native speakers, and those hesitant to use digital tools.

Vandenbroucke acknowledged the potential of digitalisation in enhancing access to rights, citing examples like using income data to inform people about available allowances. He emphasised, however, that digitalisation should not come at the expense of direct human interaction, particularly in healthcare, where face-to-face contact is crucial. He also highlighted the importance of investing in cybersecurity to protect patient rights and suggested that the benefits of digital tools must be balanced against the need to ensure they do not exclude vulnerable groups.

De Schutter echoed these sentiments, pointing out the dual potential of digitalisation to both enhance access to rights and exacerbate exclusion, particularly for elderly and marginalised populations. He emphasised the need to maintain the value of personal interaction between social workers and individuals to address complex needs that cannot be met through digital systems alone. He also referenced research indicating that gaps in digital skills, lack of information, and complex administrative processes often prevent people from accessing their rights, underscoring the need for systems to be more aware and adaptable.

The session concluded with a call for comprehensive EU strategies on digital inclusion, stressing the importance of data protection and equitable access to digital services. The panellists emphasised the role of cross-sectoral collaboration and stakeholder engagement in shaping inclusive digital policies that promote social cohesion and economic resilience.

Overall, the discussions at the #PeP2024 conference reflected a strong dialogue on addressing poverty, homelessness, child welfare, and digital inclusion within the European Union. The panellists highlighted the importance of evidence-based policymaking, sustainable funding mechanisms, and inclusive governance in achieving meaningful progress towards social justice and economic prosperity across Member States. The conversations underscored the interconnectedness of these issues and the need for collaborative action at both the EU and national levels to build a more equitable and resilient Europe.

# 8. Agora

The last session of PeP2024 was held as an agora which refers to a public open space or gathering place for open discussions and exchanges of ideas, often in a format that encourages participation from all attendees. An agora, rooted in ancient Greek tradition, offers a dynamic and inclusive format for conference sessions, fostering active participation from all attendees. This open dialogue setting encouraged diverse voices, promotes collaboration, and adapts flexibly to participants' needs, making discussions more responsive and impactful.

By empowering individuals and enhancing engagement, agora type sessions provide broader perspectives on complex issues, facilitate networking, and create a sense of community, ultimately leading to richer and more meaningful exchanges of ideas.

#PeP2024's agora highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals and communities, and emphasised the need for comprehensive, empathetic, and inclusive policy approaches.

Prior to the agora, a hands-on workshop on drawing and using visual representations to express stories and messages was conducted which was held by a visual facilitation expert. Many delegates took part in the session and then shared some of these drawings during the agora.

Find a collection of many of the personal stories and insights shared at the agora by the various delegations represented:

## 1. Iceland:

A delegate shared a poignant story of receiving bad news just before Christmas and the desire to shield her daughter from hardship. She stressed the importance of focusing on children, stating, "If you save the children, there is hope." She also spoke about the phenomenon of "digital prisons," where people are excessively trapped by technology, remarking, "Some of my friends are on their phone for 6 hours. They are in the prison of electricity. They still have the stairs to freedom but some of them are trapped."



## 2. Belgium:

Genevieve from Belgium expressed frustration with the slow progress in addressing poverty, saying, “There’s always 3 steps ahead and 2 steps behind. We want the EU to listen and take our voices into the debate.” She highlighted the increase in homelessness and violence against people experiencing poverty in Europe, particularly in Brussels, and called for greater inclusion of these voices in policy discussions. She ended on this question: “How can we make politicians understand the expertise of people experiencing poverty?”

## 3. Ireland:

Delegates from Ireland contrasted an ideal world with the current reality, stressing the need for tangible changes and better support systems.

## 4. Austria:

Austria's delegation showcased their innovative approach through the “theatre of the oppressed,” which uses performance to convey the experiences of poverty and move audiences emotionally. They also discussed their media prize initiative, where people experiencing poverty evaluate journalists to encourage accurate and respectful reporting. Calling upon their experience of going directly to decision makers in Austria, a call was made to engage directly with the European Parliament next time, rather than being relegated to less prominent venues.

## 5. Netherlands:

The Dutch delegation emphasised the importance of shared experiences across countries and identified five essential needs for a basic life: income, housing, education/work, support, and health.

## 6. Croatia:

Croatian delegates pointed out that many pensioners must continue working due to inadequate pensions, while youth leave the country in search of opportunities. They stressed the urgent need for political will to address poverty, stating, “A society is judged on the basis of how it treats its vulnerable.”

## 7. Czechia:

Inspired by Austria, the Czech delegation awarded the best media coverage on poverty issues to combat prejudice and encourage accurate reporting. They urged other countries to adopt similar initiatives.

## 8. France:

French delegates warned of growing disillusionment with the EU and the rise of the far right, which threatens social support systems. They emphasised that this disillusionment is dangerous because it will be used against the values of the EU to increase austerity and oppress immigrants. They ended with this call to action: “It takes a village to make change happen.”

## 9. Germany:

A 71-year-old delegate shared her struggle with poverty after 45 years of self-employment, highlighting the difficulties faced by the elderly and the working class. She called for urgent action, noting, “A life of self-determination is not possible in these conditions.”

## 10. Greece:

Greek delegates criticised ongoing fiscal policies that hinder efforts to combat poverty, particularly regarding minimum income guarantees and social housing. They also shared reflections based on comments from panellists saying that tech and AI was not a problem in Brussels, saying “If you put in good stuff, you get good stuff out. If you put in bad stuff, you get bad stuff out.” in reference to the discriminatory decisions made and implemented through the use of AI systems.

## 11. Latvia:

Latvian representatives argued that ending poverty is a political choice and called for practical steps from politicians, especially around minimum income.

## 12. Lithuania:

Lithuanian delegates expressed dissatisfaction with not the fact that not all delegates could vote on all recommendations, remarking especially on a

specific recommendation that demanded stopping funding for wars.

“We want to stop poverty but when there is a war more people end up in poverty. Some of us are living in the shadow of war. We hope that EAPN will reformulate this recommendation because the cost of inaction will be even higher in the future.”

They shared their local context in Lithuania as a neighbour to Ukraine where Russia’s war of aggression is currently being waged, saying that it was imperative to ensure funding also went towards standing up against Russia to prevent more countries from being forced into war leading to further regional destabilisation and increased poverty.

### 13. 🇲🇹 Malta:

“Poverty is addiction and addiction is poverty. It’s a cycle that only becomes harder to solve with time.” A Maltese delegate shared their personal story about the impact of addiction on families, emphasising the need for systemic support to break the cycle of poverty and addiction.

They also advocated for respectful and realistic media portrayals of poverty.

“Nothing about us, without us.” The delegation also mentioned the lack of education available to children from Roma communities and how this needs to be addressed urgently.



### 14. 🇵🇹 Portugal:

Portuguese delegates called for solutions that include the working poor, aspiring to create a more inclusive society.

### 15. 🇲🇰 North Macedonia:

“In North Macedonia, intergenerational poverty leads to children inheriting poverty because of lack of opportunities and social inclusion. Sometimes children will spend their whole lives unable to escape poverty.” Highlighting intergenerational poverty, North Macedonian delegates urged better policies and greater EU involvement, stressing the role of NGOs in providing essential support.

### 16. 🇷🇸 Serbia:

“30% of people in Serbia experience poverty. They are not living but surviving.” Serbian delegates pointed out the high levels of poverty and corruption in their country, calling for governmental resolution and expressing gratitude for the visibility and involvement provided by the conference.

### 17. 🇸🇰 Slovakia:

Slovak delegates highlighted the challenges faced by large families, especially among marginalised groups, and proposed community-driven solutions like self-help housing projects to foster a sense of ownership and pride over housing to enable more sustainable solutions.

The agora session underscored the diverse and deeply personal experiences of poverty across Europe, calling for a unified, empathetic, and rights-based approach to tackling this pervasive issue. Delegates emphasised the necessity of political will, inclusive policies, and the active participation of those experiencing poverty in shaping solutions. As one delegate poignantly noted, “Ending poverty is a political choice.”

# 9. Main takeaways

The value of the EAPN network and related PeP Meetings lie in their bottom-up approach to policy influence, their commitment to social justice, and their role in spotlighting people experiencing poverty to have a direct say in the decisions that affect their lives. These meetings are not just about listening to the voices of the poor—they are about ensuring that these voices drive the conversation, leading to more effective, inclusive, and humane policies.

Based on the needs, recommendations and reflections of PeP raised during the event, the next steps for the different stakeholders would include:

## 1. Strengthening Minimum Income Systems

### Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):

- **Advocacy and Consultation:** CSOs should continue to advocate for a minimum income that guarantees a dignified life, ensuring that it is sufficient to cover the actual cost of living. They should actively involve affected communities in policy discussions and ensure their voices are heard.
- **Monitoring and Accountability:** CSOs need to monitor the implementation of minimum income policies and hold governments accountable for their commitments. This includes reporting on the effectiveness of these policies and advocating for necessary adjustments.

### EU Institutions:

- **Policy Development:** The EU should work towards establishing a European framework for minimum income that mandates adequate and equitable support across all Member States. This framework should include provisions for regular review and adjustment to account for inflation and changes in the cost of living.
- **Support and Funding:** EU institutions should allocate sufficient funds to support Member

States in implementing robust minimum income schemes, especially in regions where poverty is most prevalent.

### National Governments:

- **Implementation:** Governments must implement minimum income policies that reflect the real cost of living and remove discriminatory barriers that prevent ethnic minorities, migrants, and other vulnerable groups from accessing these benefits.
- **Policy Review:** Regularly review and adjust minimum income levels to ensure they remain adequate, with input from those directly affected by poverty.

## 2. Enhancing Digital Accessibility and Inclusion

### Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):

- **Digital Literacy Programs:** CSOs should develop and promote digital literacy programs to help people, especially those experiencing poverty, navigate online services. This includes training social workers to provide digital support.
- **Advocacy for Inclusivity:** CSOs must advocate for digital services to be accessible in multiple formats and languages, ensuring no one is excluded from accessing essential services.

### EU Institutions:

- **Legislation and Standards:** The EU should enforce legislation that ensures digital services are inclusive, secure, and user-friendly, with clear guidelines for accessibility in multiple languages and formats.
- **Support for Digital Infrastructure:** Provide funding and resources to support the development of digital infrastructure, particularly in underserved regions, to bridge the digital divide.

### National Governments:

- **Multi-Channel Service Delivery:** Ensure that public services are available through multiple channels—digital, physical, telephonic—so that people can choose the method that best suits their needs.
- **Digital Inclusion Policies:** Develop and implement national policies aimed at increasing digital inclusion, particularly for vulnerable populations.

### 3. Addressing Homelessness and Housing Instability

#### Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):

- **Advocacy for Housing Rights:** CSOs should advocate for the recognition of housing as a fundamental human right and work to ensure that unhoused individuals are included in policy development and implementation.
- **Support Services:** Provide support services for people transitioning from institutions and those at risk of homelessness, ensuring they have access to stable housing and social benefits.

#### EU Institutions:

- **European Strategy on Homelessness:** Develop a comprehensive European strategy to combat homelessness, backed by dedicated funding. This strategy should include monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure its effectiveness.
- **Regulation of Housing Markets:** EU institutions should encourage Member States to implement regulations that protect renters and control rental prices to prevent housing speculation.

#### National Governments:

- **Housing Policies:** Implement policies that prioritise the creation and maintenance of affordable and social housing, and regulate the private housing market to protect against speculation and exploitation.
- **Support for Vulnerable Groups:** Focus on providing holistic support systems for vulnerable groups, including those leaving institutions and the working poor, ensuring they have access to stable housing and social benefits.

### 4. Promoting Inclusive Policy Development

#### Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):

- **Facilitate Participation:** CSOs should work to ensure that people experiencing poverty are actively involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies that affect them. This includes organising forums, workshops, and consultations that give a platform to marginalised voices.
- **Capacity Building:** Provide training and resources to empower marginalised communities to engage effectively in policy discussions.

#### EU Institutions:

- **Inclusive Policymaking:** Establish mechanisms to ensure that policymaking at the EU level includes the input of those directly affected by poverty and social exclusion. This could involve the creation of advisory panels composed of individuals with lived experience of poverty.
- **Funding for Engagement:** Allocate funds to support the participation of marginalised communities in EU policy processes, ensuring their voices are represented in decision-making.

#### National Governments:

- **Consultation Processes:** Develop national consultation processes that actively involve people experiencing poverty in policymaking. This could include public hearings, surveys, and the establishment of citizen advisory boards.
- **Transparent Policy Development:** Ensure that the development of social policies is transparent and includes input from civil society and those directly affected by the issues being addressed.

# 10. Resources

1. <https://www.eapn.eu/what-is-poverty/poverty-in-the-eu-a-very-real-problem/>
2. <https://www.eapn.eu/voices-of-poverty/>
3. National PeP reports 2024
4. Previous PeP reports from EAPN.





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[WWW.EAPN.EU](http://WWW.EAPN.EU)