



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

# PEOPLE'S SUMMIT

**BUILDING THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL RIGHTS**  
*Towards an EU Anti-Poverty Strategy*

**REPORT**

December, 2024



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# ABOUT THE 2024 PEOPLE'S SUMMIT

On 18th July 2024, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the launch of the first-ever Anti-Poverty Strategy of the EU during the mandate 2024-2029. Whereas the scope and level of ambition of the proposal was not known yet at the time of the People's Summit, this announcement was already very much welcomed by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).

At the same time, the European Commission also committed to renew the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the Gender Equality, LGBTIQ Equality and the Anti-Racism Strategies. It also committed to launching new initiatives such as the Quality Jobs Roadmap, a Pact for European Social Dialogue and a European Affordable Housing Plan.

These announcements are taking place in a challenging policy and political context, marked by a strong focus put by the new European Commission on security, defense and competitiveness to the detriment of fundamental rights and the surge of the far right at the European Parliament and Council of the EU.

EAPN has been advocating for an EU Anti-Poverty Strategy since its creation in 1990. However, President Von der Leyen's announcement is therefore also raises a crucial question: **How to ensure the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy effectively eradicates poverty and social exclusion?**

This was the guiding question of the People's Summit, which took place on 28 November 2024 in Brussels, Belgium. The event, organised by EAPN, gathered around 60/70 participants from EAPN national members, persons experiencing poverty, EU institutions, EU civil society organisations and academics. This document aims to gather the main conclusions and take away of the event.

The 2024 People's Summit is one of the main deliverables of EAPN advocacy strategy towards an EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, which was kicked off in October 2024 with the launch of our [Roadmap](#) outlining our process proposal for an effective strategy.

## ABOUT EAPN

The European Anti-Poverty Network is the largest European network of national, regional and local networks, including anti-poverty NGOs and grassroots groups, as well as European organisations active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Together, we defend the rights of people experiencing poverty and ensure their participation in the EU decision making process. The People's Summit is our annual policy conference, during which we gather EU decision-makers in a dialogue with people experiencing poverty and EAPN national members.





Opening pannel with Sérgio Aires (former EAPN President), Stefan Olsson (DG for Employment) and Carlos Susías (EAPN President).

## PLENARY SESSION

How to connect the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy to the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EU Affordable Housing Plan?

The launch of the first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will take place in a more-than-challenging context. While poverty rates are alarmingly stable, with 94.6 million people in the EU at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023 (21.4% of the total EU population), causes and factors of poverty have increasingly complexified in recent years, with inflation rates leading to further energy poverty and housing insecurity.

It is EAPN belief that poverty is not simply a matter of material deprivation and low income, but a complex web of intersecting social, political and systemic factors.

Only a comprehensive EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will be able to grasp the complexity of poverty. Its intersection with other key policy frameworks, such as the renewed European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and the upcoming EU Affordable Housing Plan, will also be crucial to make it an effective tool contributing to the eradication of poverty. These are the issues which were discussed by the first speakers of the People's Summit.

The event was opened by **Carlos Susias, EAPN President**. In his intervention, he welcomed the announcement of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy by the European Commission, and highlighted we need to work even harder to end poverty in the EU. The EU Anti-Poverty will be the opportunity to contribute to the eradication of poverty and to change the lives of the 95 millions of people living in poverty in the EU. He highlighted housing as one of the main challenges which will need to be urgently addressed.



**Stefan Olsson, Deputy Director General of the Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission**, opened the plenary session with a keynote address. He mentioned that the 2024 People's Summit comes at a unique moment, when the new College of Commissioners is about to start its new mandate. The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will mark a major step forward to address poverty in the EU. He highlighted that the Commission is willing to listen to all ideas about the future EU APS. It will be part of an overarching action plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, with a stronger focus on the European Child Guarantee and housing. Stefan Olsson also mentioned homelessness as one of the most extreme forms of social exclusion, and energy poverty as a significant issue which will need to be addressed by the EU and member states. To conclude, he highlighted that some groups remain disproportionately affected by poverty, including groups remain disproportionately affected by poverty, including children, young people, persons with disabilities, and people born outside the EU. The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will have to take these vulnerabilities into account.

**Sergio Aires, anti-poverty expert and former EAPN President**, reacted to the keynote address by highlighting that, over the last 30 years, there has been a lot of talks but a few concrete actions to reduce poverty. The Lisbon Strategy was the closest tool to a real anti-poverty strategy, but it lost momentum and was replaced by sectoral tools with no real coordination.

One of the main issue is that we keep dividing policies in silos. Civil society organisations are pushed to compete for funds instead of working together. These divides overall weaken the fight against poverty. Sergio Aires mentioned that he is concerned that the new Anti-Poverty Strategy will repeat the same mistakes as before. What is at stake is democracy. People living in poverty are angry, and rightly so. Their frustration is fueling support for far-right parties, and it might already be too late in some areas.

**Barbara Koenen, person experiencing poverty (PeP)**, recalled throughout her intervention the main recommendations of the EAPN PeP meeting, which took place last June. Among them, she highlighted the crucial need for politicians to better understand poverty, for instance through training by those who are directly impacted. She recalled that living a dignified life is not just about minimum income. It is also connected to housing, education and healthcare. A holistic approach is needed if we want to eradicate poverty. The EU needs to monitor the implementation of the Council Recommendation on minimum income. If no significant progress were made, a directive should be considered. Concerning the Child Guarantee, it must provide comprehensive support for parents, including on housing, healthcare and childcare services. In the same way, Barbara Koenen, as a person who experienced homelessness, recalled that housing is a key issue. Housing policies should be designed with people experiencing poverty.

# GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The plenary session was followed by two sessions of group discussions, aiming to discuss two set of issues:

- **How to shape the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy?**
- **What should the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy include?**

At the end of the day, participants gathered in plenary in order to share the main learnings and conclusions of each group discussions. These conclusions are summarised below.

## 1. Which EU funding to eradicate poverty? Preparing the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

A policy strategy cannot be impactful without appropriate funding. However, the issues of funding and resources are often overlooked in our advocacy strategies. This can be about taxation and who contributed to public funding, but also about how public funding is redistributed and who benefits – or not – from it. Overall, **deciding how public money is spent, to whom it benefits and to what extent inequalities and dynamics of oppression are addressed or reinforced is a political choice.**

The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will be launched at a crucial moment marked by the renewal of the EU budget (Multiannual Financial Framework – MFF). Whereas it is in theory an opportunity to secure ambitious public funding to contribute to the eradication of poverty, the negotiations

of the MFF post-2027 will take place in a context marked by austerity-driven discourses and a strong focus of the European Commission on security and defence.

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Group discussion.

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### How can the MFF post-2027 contribute to the implementation of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the eradication of poverty?

During this group discussion, **Enrico Tormen**, Advocacy Adviser at Save the Children and **Sarah Chander**, Director at Equinox Initiative for Racial Justice discussed concrete ways forward for the next MFF.

#### PARTICIPANTS REACHED THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

- The current shape of the MFF – mostly focused on short-term actions and projects – makes it **impossible to address the systemic root causes of poverty**. And without addressing the systemic root causes of poverty, its eradication will remain wishful thinking.
- Accessing EU funds of the current MFF, such as the European Social Fund + (ESF+), requires heavy administrative requirements. Overall, this favors bigger organisations to the detriment of smaller ones or those run by volunteers.

- The budget of the MFF allocated to address poverty and social exclusion might suffer from the ever-growing focus of the European Commission on security and defence. As the MFF is mostly based on fixed contributions of EU member states, it is about allocating this envelope of budget to various priorities, one having an effect on the other.



Group discussion.

### 2. Involving people experiencing poverty (PeP) in the drafting of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. EAPN recommendation for a PeP Committee

For decades, EAPN has championed the meaningful participation of People Experiencing Poverty (PeP) in shaping social policies at both national and European levels. Participation is not just about consultation - it is about **shifting power dynamics and ensuring that those directly affected by poverty are at the heart of decision-making**. Too often, policies designed to combat poverty are developed without the voices of those who live its realities every day. This disconnect results in fragmented, top-down approaches that fail to address the multidimensional nature of poverty - a reality that can only be fully understood by those who experience it.



The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy presents a historic opportunity to **embed PeP participation into its very foundation**. If the EU is serious about eradicating poverty, it must go beyond policy rhetoric and structurally integrate the expertise of those who have firsthand experience with social exclusion, systemic inequality, and institutional barriers. Meaningful participation means ensuring that PeP are not just present in the room, but that their perspectives shape the agenda, the priorities, and the outcomes of the strategy itself.

This session, facilitated by **Karin Johansson** (a person experiencing poverty from EAPN Sweden) and **Anthony Zacharzewski** (President of Democratic Society), explored how to institutionalise PeP participation in the Anti-Poverty Strategy and how to ensure that their voices drive long-term, structural change.



*Person Experiencing Poverty during the Plenary Session.*

At the core of this discussion was EAPN's proposal to establish a PeP Committee, an independent advisory body that would bring together people experiencing poverty, policymakers, and civil society organizations to ensure ongoing and meaningful participation in shaping EU social policies.

#### **PARTICIPANTS REACHED THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:**

- **Institutionalising PeP participation beyond tokenism:** Participants stressed the need for a structural mechanism that ensures PeP are genuinely involved in decision-making processes. Past experiences of PeP participation in EU processes have often been reduced to tokenism, reinforcing stereotypes and stigmas rather than creating real change. To be meaningful, PeP involvement must be valued, properly resourced, and treated as an essential part of policy design - not an afterthought.
- **Addressing structural barriers to participation:** Key challenges in integrating PeP voices into policymaking were identified, including:
  - **Skepticism:** from policymakers, either regarding PeP's ability to contribute or regarding their own meaningful investment in the process. They suggested to instaurate dedicated training sessions for policymakers for a mutual understanding on the multi-dimensional aspect of poverty, and all the consequences it can have on people's lives.

- Lack of adequate support for PeP participation. Unlike policymakers and experts, PeP are often expected to contribute without financial compensation, despite the time, expertise, and lived experience they bring. They also stressed that this support should not be limited to financial support only, as there are many barriers to PeP's participation.
- Necessity for structural support, such as logistical assistance, translation services, and digital access, to ensure equal participation in discussions. Indeed, participants emphasize for a proper institutional accompaniment of this anti-poverty strategy.
- **The role and independence of the two committees, PeP Committee and CSO Committee:** The two Committees, as proposed by EAPN, must be independent of political influence and designed to ensure accountability. They should be a long-term structure, not a one-off consultation mechanism. These committees should:
  - Have clear mandates, including policy monitoring and structured dialogue with EU institutions.
  - Develop a Code of Conduct that defines the terms of engagement between PeP and policymakers.
  - Ensure representation from diverse PeP backgrounds (e.g., women, migrants and undocumented migrants, persons with disabilities, Roma communities) to provide a holistic perspective on poverty.

- **Ensuring policy impact and accountability:** The discussion emphasized that participation should lead to visible policy impact. Participants called for mechanisms that:
  - Hold decision-makers accountable for integrating PeP recommendations into policy.
  - Ensure follow-up and continuity so that PeP are not simply invited to meetings but also involved in monitoring policy implementation.
  - Support PeP in engaging with others across Europe, preventing individual voices from being isolated and ensuring collective representation.
- **Shifting the power dynamics in decision-making:** A key reflection was that governments and EU institutions are often disconnected from the realities of poverty. Many policymakers rarely interact with PeP and develop policies based on theoretical assumptions rather than lived realities. To change this, it is crucial to:
  - Create safe and inclusive spaces where PeP feel empowered to engage on their own terms.
  - Recognise PeP as experts in their own right, capable of co-creating solutions rather than just being policy recipients.
  - Move from top-down decision-making to a participatory governance model where PeP are integral to policy formation.

### 3. Learning from anti-poverty national strategies

EAPN and its members have been advocating for a long time not only for an EU but also for national anti-poverty strategies. Strategies are indeed essential to commit to strong political goals, tools, and funding to advance the eradication of poverty. Now, there is no obligation at the EU level for member states to adopt national anti-poverty strategies. The situation is currently patchy across EU member states, with very good practices to non-existent prospects of adopting such strategies. The announcement of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, as well as the negotiation of the next MFF, are key opportunities to advance the adoption of ambitious and well-funded national anti-poverty strategies. During this group discussion moderated by **Biljana Dukovska**, President of EAPN North Macedonia & EAPN Bureau member, **Paul Ginnell**, Director of EAPN Ireland and **Helder Ferreira**, Director of Public Policy of EAPN Spain shared their experience from their respective country.

#### PARTICIPANTS REACHED THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

- Meaningful and effective participation of persons experiencing poverty and civil society organisations are crucial in the design, implementation and evaluation of national anti-poverty strategies.
- Due to the complexity of poverty, national strategies must be able to adapt over time to external factors such as pandemic, wars and climate change.

- National anti-poverty strategies, such as the EU one, cannot work in silos. Different areas need to intersect, such as anti-discrimination as well as measures aiming to mitigate the effects of the climate and digital transitions on marginalised people.
- In the same way, national anti-poverty strategies need to be **adequately funded** through progressive and fair redistributive systems. In this context, tax evasion must be addressed by EU member states to free up public resources to eradicate poverty. The issue of **poverty indicators** as trackers of successful anti-poverty strategies has also been mentioned by participants. How can the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy contribute to ensure member states do not manipulate these indicators?

### 4. How to connect the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy with climate policies?

This breakout session, led by **Roxana Della Fiamor**, focused on the importance of linking the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (APS) with climate policies. Poverty and climate change are deeply connected challenges, therefore, recognising their relationship is essential for achieving fairness and sustainable development in the face of the growing climate crisis. Participants discussed the need for a transformative approach to both social and climate justice, recognizing that these challenges often stem from the same systemic inequalities and societal structures that often marginalize the most vulnerable groups.



## PARTICIPANTS REACHED THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

- Prevailing perception of poverty and climate change as **separate entities** undermines the potential for comprehensive solutions. Participants asserted that without a unified approach, the most disadvantaged groups, often bearing the brunt of climate impacts, will continue to face increasing hardships.
- There is a need to **advocate for integrated policies framework** that puts people at the heart of both climate and poverty strategies. Local governance represents a critical player in fostering innovative solutions that bridge the specific needs of communities, allowing for tailored responses that directly address the needs of affected communities.
- A just transition must go beyond financial compensation for job losses caused by shifts in industry, such as coal mine closures. Emphasis was placed on the need for policies that not only provide financial support but also **restore dignity and purpose to those affected**, ultimately fostering a resilient and adaptable workforce. A cornerstone of effective policy development is the **active involvement of those most impacted by poverty and climate change**. Inclusive dialogue should serve to empower communities and foster solutions that genuinely reflect their real needs and aspirations. The session highlighted several concrete examples, in the areas of children's participation in climate advocacy, local governance as actors for empowerment,

and involving vulnerable groups in the design of the Social Climate Funds.

- There is an alarming and ongoing **disconnect among existing policies** and the lack of coordination between policies addressing poverty and climate change, which often fail to address the multifaceted nature of poverty and climate change. Participants proposed actionable strategies and approaches for enhancing cohesion among policies, such as linking climate risks with social funding initiatives and improving collaboration between different EU governing departments and within local and national governmental structures
- The need to shift from EU centric climate policy **to a more global approach** to these intertwined issues was emphasized, noting that the most vulnerable populations bear the least responsibility for climate change yet suffer its consequences disproportionately. To address this disparity, accountability at the state level and active engagement in international efforts are essential.

## 5. How to step the EU Minimum Income with the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy?

Adequate and accessible Minimum Income Schemes (MIS) are one of the advocacy priorities of EAPN. Indeed, MIS are **crucial elements in multidimensional anti-poverty strategies**, both at national and EU levels. They help guarantee decent standards of living to enable people to fully participate in society. Now, every EU member state has MIS in place. However, they vary greatly in terms of adequacy, accessibility and eligibility criteria. In all cases, they are not sufficient to contribute to the eradication of poverty, as most of the time, they are not enough to even reach the poverty threshold and are **far from meeting the needs of people living in poverty**.

The adoption of the Council Recommendation on Minimum Income in January 2023 marked a positive step forward, by providing for the first time ever guidelines to EU member states on MIS. However, EAPN keeps advocating for an EU binding tool such as a Directive on Minimum Income, in order to guarantee adequate, accessible MIS with enabling characteristics in all EU member states. The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will be the opportunity to advocate for such legally binding tool but also, to find creative ways to step up and improve MIS in all EU member states. This is the main question, which was discussed during this workshop, which was facilitated by **Eleni Karaoli**, Secretary of EAPN Cyprus & EAPN Bureau member.

**Jiri Svarc**, Head of Unit on Social Policies & Child Guarantee, DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, was invited to provide his perspective.

### PARTICIPANTS REACHED THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

- The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy can **build on existing strategies, projects and frameworks**, such as the EMIN project led by EAPN and its members,
- How can the EU **push EU member states to implement the Council Recommendation**? This is one of the key questions to address in the absence of an EU legally binding tool on MIS.
- As discussed in a previous workshop, the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy is the opportunity to step up **national anti-poverty strategies**, which can also be used to ensure adequate and accessible MIS with enabling characteristics.
- **Leave no one behind**: MIS and the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy should consider all ages, genders, people who are far from the labour market, Roma people, migrants, etc.
- **Non-take-up of MIS** is also a crucial issue to address, be it from a data collection to a prevention perspective.

## 6. Poverty as a fundamental rights violation: How to connect the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy with EU Anti-Discrimination Strategies?

For years, EAPN has advocated for a stronger, more comprehensive EU Anti-Discrimination Strategy that **recognises poverty as a fundamental rights violation rather than just an economic challenge**. Structural discrimination and systemic inequalities reinforce cycles of poverty, disproportionately affecting racialized groups, migrants and undocumented people, Roma communities, persons with disabilities, women, and other marginalized groups. However, anti-poverty policies often **fail to acknowledge these structural barriers, leading to fragmented, inadequate, and ineffective responses**.

The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (APS) provides an opportunity to embed anti-discrimination principles at the core of social policy, ensuring a multidimensional approach that addresses poverty as both a social and racial injustice. This workshop, led by **Julie Pascoet**, Advocacy and Policy Coordinator at the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), explored **how the EU can mainstream anti-discrimination efforts into the APS and ensure that intersectionality, racial justice, and economic inclusion become central pillars of European policymaking**.

## PARTICIPANTS REACHED THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

- The discussion underscored that poverty cannot be eradicated without addressing systemic racism and discrimination. Structural barriers - such as racial profiling, housing segregation, educational exclusion, and employment discrimination - systematically deny racialised communities' access to economic opportunities. Data from Germany and France highlight stark racial wage gaps and higher poverty rates among migrants and racialised groups, proving that poverty is racialised across Europe.
- EU policies often treat different forms of discrimination in silos, failing to account for the multiple, overlapping forms of oppression people experience. The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan (2020), Gender Equality Strategy, the Roma Inclusion Framework, and LGBTQI+ Strategy all aim to address discrimination, but they lack cross-cutting measures that connect poverty, race, and social exclusion. The APS must bridge these gaps by ensuring that all anti-poverty measures explicitly address racial, gender, and migration-based inequalities.



- Participants noted that while EU legal frameworks such as the Race Equality Directive prohibit racial discrimination, enforcement mechanisms remain weak. Far-right political forces have blocked or undermined national-level implementation, while anti-migrant and anti-Roma policies continue to fuel exclusion. Furthermore, the EU lacks legally binding obligations for Member States to integrate anti-discrimination measures into social policies. The APS must include stronger accountability mechanisms, such as funding conditions tied to non-discriminatory policies and mandatory equality impact assessments.
- The discussion highlighted the need for direct involvement of racialised groups and people experiencing poverty in policymaking. Too often, anti-discrimination strategies are designed without input from those most affected, leading to policies that fail to reflect real lived experiences. Organizations like ENAR and EAPN have pushed for more inclusive policy-making processes, but participants stressed that civil society must do more to ensure marginalised voices are not just consulted but empowered to shape policy agendas.

- The lack of coordination between EU strategies was identified as a major challenge. The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, for instance, was not initially linked to anti-poverty strategies, despite overwhelming evidence that racial discrimination and poverty are interconnected. Participants urged the EU to:
  - Integrate anti-discrimination objectives directly into the APS, ensuring all poverty reduction measures are anti-racist and intersectional.
  - Strengthen the EU Equality Task Force, ensuring it has greater political influence, resources, and enforcement power.
  - Ensure national anti-poverty strategies are aligned with EU anti-discrimination commitments, using clear benchmarks and funding mechanisms.

# AFTER THE PEOPLE'S SUMMIT

## AFTER THE PEOPLE'S SUMMIT WAYS FORWARD FOR EAPN ON THE EU ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

The 2024 People's Summit have been the opportunity to gather EAPN members and people experiencing poverty behind a clear message: we are counting on the European Commission to come up with an **ambitious and comprehensive EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**, aiming towards the eradication of poverty and involving meaningfully people experiencing poverty.

**2025 will be a crucial year:** the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will be launched alongside the renewed European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and Anti-Discrimination Strategies and the proposal of MFF post-2027. In a context where security, defence and competitiveness are the main focus of the European Commission 2024-2029, EAPN will remain at the forefront to ensure the voice of marginalised people, especially those experiencing poverty, are duly considered.



*Reporting session with rapporteurs from the Group Discussion Groups.*

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