

28 MARCH PORTO EDITION 2025 **PEOPLE'S SUMMIT**

REPORT



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People's Summit 2025, Porto Edition

The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy: From Intention To Action

INTRODUCTION

The European Anti-Poverty Network Portugal (EAPN Portugal) and the European Anti-Poverty Network Europe (EAPN Europe) hosted the second edition of the People's Summit in Porto on 28 March 2025, bringing together people experiencing poverty, EAPN Members, national and European policymakers, and grassroots social organisations to discuss the implementation of the first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, announced by Ursula von der Leyen when the new European Commission took office in 2024.

The People's Summit also aimed to influence the Social Forum, held in September in Porto, to reinforce the commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights and to co-design the first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. The challenges are many, and the mix of panels and workshops was intended to reflect on and propose recommendations in crucial areas such as the social protection of workers, lack of access to social benefits and housing, and the participation of people experiencing poverty. The current international context demands that the European Union uphold its historic role in defending the values of freedom and equality, and live up to the original mission of peace and cooperation. We must shift the current paradigm based on competition and growth, and recentre Europe on positive social change, with a focus on the eradication of Poverty.

Maria Joaquina Madeira, President of EAPN Portugal, said: *"There is a common concern that has moved us for many years: poverty and the struggle for its eradication. This remains one of the most urgent challenges of our time, as it is a phenomenon that is directly impacted by political choices. And these political choices have not allowed the fight against poverty to be considered a priority".*

The latest figures show that 99.3 million people remain at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Europe in 2024, with about 2 million people in Portugal alone. The numbers have remained stable since the first Porto Summit in 2017, even worsening during periods of economic crisis. This lack of progress reflects a failure to address the structural causes of poverty, preventing Europe from becoming resilient to both domestic and international shocks.

The President of EAPN Europe, Carlos Susías Rodo, said: *"For us, it is important that, at the operational level, the European Pillar of Social Rights is integrated and coordinated with the strategy of the fight against poverty. It emphasises the need to focus on the fight against poverty, even in challenging times like the current one."*

The representative of the Local Council of Citizens of Porto, Carla Teixeira, said: *"I was not expecting that after 50 years of freedom in our country, our children, at the age of 30, after leaving their parents' house at 18, to go to study miles from home, in other cities, had to ask for help or return to their parents' house. It's sad. We have to value young people and create the conditions for them to stay in Portugal, so that they can live, not survive, and that they enjoy being in Portugal because they feel supported."*

The representative of the Porto City Council, Fernando Paulo, emphasised that the fight against poverty is a shared responsibility requiring a firm commitment from institutions, social organisations, and the entire community.

DELIVERING ON THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS AND THE PATH TOWARDS AN EU ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

Key issues were discussed with the presence of senior representatives from the European Commission and the European Parliament, along with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights. EAPN Europe presented its very first vision for the European Anti-Poverty Strategy. A representative from the Irish delegation of people experiencing poverty also contributed to the discussion.

For **Katarina Ivanković Knežević**, one of the major challenges is not only meeting the Pillar's targets by 2030, but also ensuring that Member States are on a clear path to reaching their national targets.

The multitude of initiatives and measures under the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan have been important in improving **people's living conditions and addressing the multiple dimensions of poverty**.

Moreover, the new EPSR Action Plan, to be launched in autumn 2025 and followed by the European Anti-Poverty Strategy, has the potential to tackle poverty systemically and deliver tangible results. This is why the European Commission must make the case to European leaders that eradicating poverty will benefit European societies and strengthen democratic participation.

According to the European Commission itself, the European Strategy will come with a **multidimensional perspective**, reflecting the diversity of realities and populations. It will also create spaces for participation of impacted groups in various consultation processes, alongside Member States and the European Parliament.

The stakes are high, as noted by Olivier De Schutter, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, who claims the Strategy must be a priority, with the European Commission investing all efforts into combating poverty and inequality. ***The fight against poverty must no longer be seen as a cost but as an investment with significant returns.***

For Olivier De Schutter, four key priorities must be incorporated into the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy to make the fight against poverty effective:

- Involving **people living in poverty**, despite the time and resources it requires, is a crucial investment, as their expertise and insight must be mobilised to ensure that decisions are well informed;
- **improving social protection systems**, while highlighting the importance of combining digital access with face-to-face access, to avoid further non-take-up of rights holders;
- **combating discrimination** against people living in poverty;
- investing in more **inclusive labour markets**, with better access to education and childcare, including early childhood care.

João Oliveira (MEP, The Left, Portugal), rapporteur for the [European Anti-Poverty Strategy report](#), aims to establish key principles to guide the Commission. He emphasised the need for strong **political commitment** to the objectives and priorities of the strategy, stressing that it is critical to challenge the **economic model** that generates inequality, injustice, and discrimination. More than ever, the EU APS must guarantee **people's** economic, social, cultural, and even political **rights**.

Prevention mechanisms to avoid situations of extreme vulnerability are essential. It is also necessary to reconcile an individual approach with a structural and political approach, including a comprehensive assessment of the impact of sectoral policies on poverty. According to MEP Oliveira, an **integrated response** to a multidimensional phenomenon is crucial, particularly when addressing the specificities of national and local contexts.

Breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty remains a central dimension, alongside targeted policies to tackle specific barriers faced by women, children, the elderly, migrants, or people who are victims of racism. In this sense, it is essential **to define the roles of different actors** — state, public authorities, and civil society — as well as the different levels of action, from European to local levels.

In seeking an integrated response, Oliveira underlined the need to counteract *“the **political hate speech** that is being spread from the idea of privilege of people who are in this situation.”* This “discourse of social fracture needs to be countered” through policy. The stigma associated with poverty tends to impact people throughout their entire lives, and they are often sanctioned when trying to access their rights.

Once again, he reinforced the need for the **effective participation** of people experiencing poverty in the design, implementation, evaluation, and review of policies. Oliveira also recentred the design of the EU APS within the context of negotiations for the next multiannual financial framework, particularly important at a time when defence and military investment are being strengthened.

For **Lesley O'Reilly** of EAPN Ireland, it is essential to focus on the eradication of poverty while encouraging strong involvement of affected groups. Initiatives such as the European Pillar of Social Rights demonstrate how Europe can, at times, unite around shared goals, yet still falls short in delivering basic rights, such as housing, health, and food. To succeed, the European institutions must **create formal mechanisms for people experiencing poverty to contribute**, as they know better than anyone where the system has failed and how to improve policies.

We have to be in Brussels; there really has to be continuous, active, meaningful involvement.

Finally, **Jessica Machacova** of EAPN Europe presented our vision to influence the European Anti-Poverty Strategy.

"We must ensure that funding for social inclusion and poverty eradication is not sacrificed to prioritise competitiveness, security, and defence. Also, the hyper-focus on competitiveness risks setting aside the importance of human dignity.

Jessica Machacova pointed out the four fundamental pillars on which the European Strategy should be based:

- **A transformative vision towards the eradication of poverty**
- **A participatory approach**
- **A comprehensive strategy** that breaks silos and accounts for the multidimensionality of poverty
- Strong **governance**.

Key takeaways:

- In a Europe where 93.3 million people were in poverty or social exclusion in 2024, placing the fight against this scourge at the centre of EU action is essential. The revision of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and the launch of the first European Anti-Poverty Strategy are key instruments the European Commission can use to promote a Europe free of poverty.
- The European Anti-Poverty Strategy must address the root causes of poverty and social inequalities. These instruments must enable an integrated response to the multiple dimensions of poverty and ensure that people are placed at the centre of decision-making, with the aim of improving their quality of life.
- The EU APS will require strong political commitment at both the European and national levels. The development of national — and even local — anti-poverty strategies will be fundamental to supporting the broader European Strategy. This political commitment must also strengthen the role of the social sector and the participation of people in poverty throughout the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation phases.
- Social issues, particularly the fight against poverty and social exclusion, must be a top priority for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the EU's long-term budget. These priorities must not be undermined by increased military and security spending.

INVOLVING PERSONS EXPERIENCING POVERTY IN THE NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGIES

The People's Summit was the occasion to highlight not only the importance of the participation of people experiencing poverty in policy design and decision-making, but also the unique moment to showcase the diversity of methods and tools created by PEP themselves. To do so, three different representatives of national PEP delegations have introduced their structures of consultations. They take into account the needs of the delegates, the guiding principles of a meaningful participation, the role of civil society organisations such as EAPN and the recipe for a successful strategy. This reinforced the role of participation and its potential to lead to genuine partnerships with institutions and policymakers. Coming from a place of distrust towards public decision-makers, stemming from a lifetime of systemic obstacles and institutional violence, **the panellists emphasised the transformative power of inner strength and collective action to reclaim public space and drive change.**

Cidália Barriga, from the National Council of Citizens of Portugal:

*I stopped trusting the institutions, and I stopped trusting the political decisions and political solutions that they offered us at the time. And it was so discredited, so hopeless, that when we have no hope we fall into an even deeper hole. **Participation is just that, it is to rescue trust and teach that we can strengthen ourselves as people, and when the citizen is strong, we can build a stronger society.***

Sarah Lampen, Belgian Anti-Poverty Network:

Participation means *allowing people who are in poverty to come in their own time and learn how to participate, how to become stronger, and learn how to fight for their rights and tell the government what is wrong. **We have those policy-makers who are making the policies, building the policies, but we need to tell these drivers the way: when they have to turn right, when they have to go slower, faster. [At BAPN,] "that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to get together, work on certain topics, and gather information from the ground, the experience of people who are in poverty, who tell their experience, talk about what's going wrong, what is not working. We listen, and then we have colleagues at another level who translate that into policy language, so the government can understand it."***

Lou-Jayne, EAPN France:

"Forty years later, I am no longer a foreigner, a foreigner in a country that welcomed me, I am in my adopted country. I am in my rightful place. People have to find their place where they are. I didn't just focus on my problem: I solved my problem, but I also helped others, I took care of others, I went to my neighbourhood, I got involved in schools, and I got involved in my city council."

To reflect on the decision-making side, **Sandra Araújo**, Coordinator of the National Strategy to Combat Poverty in Portugal, stressed the importance of the mechanisms within the Portuguese Strategy that ensure the participation of different actors. One of the Strategy's pillars — **making the fight against poverty a national goal** — specifically aims to guarantee the participation of people in vulnerable situations in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, and to promote complementarity with other national strategies already in place. This has led to the establishment of a suitable structure for implementing a roadmap for participation: the Living Lab. Following the publication of the roadmap, two pilot projects were launched, involving panels of people living in poverty to debate and assess the impact of policies. The projects also aimed to collect policy proposals and recommendations in time for the mid-term evaluation report and the planning cycle of the Strategy.

*Sandra Araújo: The **National Strategy** and other ongoing strategies have to effectively get closer to citizens and political decision-makers have to be able to debate these issues and outline actions, even at the local level, that respond to people's needs.*

Key takeaways:

- Participation is both the cause and effect of democracy. The involvement of civil society organisations and people in poverty must be a working tool within the European Strategy and National Strategies to Combat Poverty.
- The People's Summit provides a space for reflection that allows affected groups themselves to assess the efforts made by the EU and Member States to combat poverty. It is also a platform to promote solutions for radical change.
- Discrimination and violence against people in poverty need to be recognised and addressed. Discrimination hinders access to rights and creates barriers to democratic participation: first by devaluing people's capacity to contribute to solutions, and thus preventing institutions from making space for their effective involvement.

THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

Three workshops¹ on the following topics took place:

- Universal access to social protection for workers
- Non-take-up of minimum income schemes and other social schemes
- Housing and homelessness

The following points present the main recommendations identified:

Workshop A: Universal Access to Social Protection for Workers

Main policy recommendations and takeaways:

- Investment in public and universal social protection systems to modernise them and reflect new models of employment (e.g. atypical contracts, digital labour, platform work).²
- Harmonisation and portability of rights at EU level, impacting migrants' access to social security (in particular pensions and unemployment benefits).
- Coordination between ministries and all public services to ensure synergy between employment, social protection, migration, equality, and other policies to guarantee job quality, fair wages, and the protection of social and labour rights for all.
- Implementation of bilateral labour migration agreements that include social protection clauses, and the strengthening of collective bargaining overall.

- Regulation of the use of Artificial Intelligence by companies and digital platforms, ensuring they contribute to the social protection system; automated taxation methods could be explored.
- Awareness-raising and information campaigns on labour rights, particularly to address the lack of information on rights and duties in the labour market. This situation is particularly relevant for young people and migrant populations.
- Recognition and appreciation of unpaid work (with particular attention to domestic and care work) to ensure people are protected throughout their lives, especially upon retirement.
- Reduction of bureaucracy and barriers in the recognition of migrants' skills and qualifications.
- Effective implementation of the [Decent Work Agenda](#) to combat all forms of discrimination in access to the labour market, reduce administrative violence and job insecurity, and promote greater monitoring of working conditions.
- Promotion of social dialogue, which is crucial for defining and monitoring policies and adapting existing legislation.

Workshop B: Non-take-up of Minimum Income Schemes and Other Social Schemes

Main policy recommendations and takeaways:

- The fragility of social benefits and the lack of access by those who need them most are among the structural causes of poverty. When social benefits are inadequate, inaccessible or not enabling, they tend to play a palliative role, resulting in an ineffective response to poverty.
- Simplify the application procedures for social benefits. For instance, some benefits should be automatic, which facilitates access for those needing support.
- Digital access to benefits and face-to-face access should be seen as complementary.
- Invest in information campaigns across various media to raise awareness of existing social benefits, their accessibility, coverage, and target groups. Lack of information and excessive bureaucracy contribute significantly to limited access.
- Guarantee access to healthcare and benefits for undocumented migrants, and simplify the documentation requirements needed to access support.
- Support public petition advocating for an adequate and accessible minimum income scheme.

- Address the stigma faced when applying for social protection, as it is a key factor leading to non-take-up. Combating stereotypes faced by rights holders and beneficiaries of minimum income schemes is essential.
- Provide bias training for professionals and social workers who engage directly with rights-holders.
- Promote the participation of rights-holders in the design and monitoring of policies to improve their effectiveness.

Workshop C: Housing and Homelessness

Main policy recommendations and takeaways:

- Invest in affordable, quality housing.
- Implement price controls on housing and regulate short-term rentals.
- Invest in the Housing First paradigm and related programmes at both the European and national levels.
- Increase the supply of adequate, quality social housing for the groups most in need.
- Establish social housing quotas in new developments and invest in municipal housing, ensuring accessibility to the most vulnerable groups.

- Promote integrated and individualised support for homeless people. Access to housing is fundamental, but it must be accompanied by other responses that promote inclusion and physical, mental, emotional, and social stability. Ending homelessness requires a mix of policies beyond housing, including health (inclusive of mental health), access to social protection and income, addiction support, and access to food and basic material assistance.
- Recognise that homelessness results from systemic and structural factors reflecting societal development. Therefore, invest not only in remediating homelessness but also in preventing it.
- Invest in bias training for professionals working with homeless people to combat discrimination.
- End the criminalisation of homelessness.
- Promote and strengthen the European Platform to Combat Homelessness (EPOCH) to improve diagnosis and debate on this phenomenon, which is a social issue rather than an individual failure.
- Involve homeless people in the definition, monitoring, and evaluation of policies directly affecting them.

CONCLUSION

Juliana Wahlgren, Director of EAPN Europe, stated: *“There is no fight against poverty without political will. The People's Summit is more than an event; it is a working methodology.”*

The summit has brought together political decision-makers — both European and national — public entities, civil society organisations, and, above all, people experiencing poverty. It is crucial to maintain this type of exercise going forward as a catalyst for change. Participation that is continuous and sustained must bring together and represent a plurality of voices and experiences. It serves as a central methodology for monitoring policy implementation, especially at a time when powerful people make decisions affecting lives while sidelining collective rights. Policies that promote an individualistic approach and focus solely on economic growth do not prioritise the redistribution of wealth, public goods and services, resources, and income for people living in poverty. The need for coordinated and comprehensive efforts has never been greater, once again highlighting the multifaceted nature of poverty. Several instruments will need to be mobilised, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Anti-Poverty Strategy, especially given the still worrying poverty figures. Cooperation between EU bodies and Member States, in terms of design, implementation, and funding will be essential. Therefore, the efforts of civil society remain necessary even during these difficult and unstable times. Their proximity to, and the trust they have built with, people in poverty make such organisations focal points for collaboration and vital for success. EAPN will continue its work — proactive and reactive — always ensuring the participation of people experiencing poverty.

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Clara Marques Mendes, Secretary of State for Social Action and Inclusion, stated: *“if we, decision-makers, do not coordinate with the other authorities, we will never have responses that are effective. Because a person is a whole, the person has health, education needs, housing needs... And if we do not work on the answers together, it will be difficult for us to effectively combat this problem structurally.”*

Strong ambitions lead to strong actions. The People's Summit 2025, entitled *The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy: From Intention to Action*, is a milestone in the fight for the future of social rights in Europe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Drafted by Paula Cruz, EAPN PT Policy Officer, Kahina Rabahi, EAPN Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, reviewed by Juliana Wahlgren, EAPN Director and the layout by Socheath Kan, EAPN Digital Communications Assistant.

28 MARCH PORTO EDITION 2025 PEOPLE'S SUMMIT



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