



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

# EC PEP CONSULTATION

## REPORT



17-18 SEPTEMBER 2025 | PORTO, PORTUGAL

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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.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation “EaSI” (2021-2025). For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>



Robert Bosch  
Stiftung



# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Commission Consultation with People Experiencing Poverty (PEP), held on 17–18 September 2025 in Porto as a side event of the Porto Social Forum, marked a pivotal moment in the shaping the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (APS). At a time when the European Commission has committed to eradicating poverty by 2050, the consultation provided an **essential participative and democratic space for those directly affected by poverty** to directly shape the vision, priorities, and governance of the future strategy.

Over two days, 21 PEP delegates from across Europe engaged in a multilingual and participatory programme combining capacity-building, thematic policy discussions, and a high-level plenary exchange with Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu and representatives of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The consultation was designed and facilitated by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), in cooperation with EAPN Portugal, as part of EAPN's long-standing **commitment to meaningful participation and to recognising lived experience as a form of policy expertise** and a strategic goal in the fight against poverty.

Preparatory work included **two online sessions and an in-person meeting** the day prior to the consultation, focused on strengthening delegates' public speaking and advocacy skills. The consultation itself was structured around **thematic workshops** addressing: access to enabling and essential services and goods, including food; housing, homelessness, and energy poverty; national and local anti-poverty strategies; new risks arising from the digitalisation of the welfare state; active inclusion: minimum income and labour market integration; intersectionality and discrimination; in-work poverty and social protection of all workers; and governance and participation of PEP in the implementation of the APS. These exchanges culminated in an **open plenary dialogue** with the Executive Vice-President.

This report captures the methodology, substance, and outcomes of the process. It presents the collective analysis, priorities, and recommendations put forward by PEP delegates and situates these contributions within the broader political and policy context. The report also makes the case for a clear proposal: to **embed lived-experience expertise in the future governance of the APS** through permanent participatory mechanisms, including the establishment of a PEP Committee linked to the strategy.

## 2 INTRODUCTION: POLITICAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

### a. A DECISIVE MOMENT FOR ANTI-POVERTY WORK

The consultation took place at a critical juncture for European social policy. In September 2025, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a political commitment to eradicate poverty in the European Union by 2050<sup>1</sup>. This announcement created both momentum and responsibility: momentum to advance a **comprehensive and ambitious EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**, and responsibility to ensure that such a strategy is grounded in lived experience, rights, and accountability.

Poverty in Europe is not an abstract phenomenon. It affects an estimated **93.3 million people who are living in, or at risk of, poverty and social exclusion**.<sup>2</sup> Poverty is experienced daily through inadequate housing, food insecurity, rising living costs, inaccessible services, precarious work, discrimination, and the progressive erosion of people's dignity and autonomy. Poverty and its stigma have deep effects on mental health, leading to forced isolation, depression, anxiety, addiction and widespread violation of fundamental human rights for millions of EU citizens. Despite decades of policy initiatives, poverty remains structurally embedded and unequally distributed, affecting disproportionately women, children, Roma communities, migrants, people with disabilities, older persons, and other historically marginalised groups. Therefore, addressing poverty requires not only technical policy solutions, but political choices, cross-sectoral coordination, and the direct involvement of those who live with its causes and consequences. That is why, for more than 30 years, EAPN has been advocating for an Anti-Poverty Strategy that is comprehensive, intersectional and is accompanied by adequate resources. As pointed out by the PEP delegation from Cyprus during the meeting, without adequate funding, the strategy risks falling short on its purpose.

*“We cannot have or build any solutions without funding” - PEP delegate from Cyprus.*

<sup>1</sup> von der Leyen, Ursula. “State of the Union September 11, 2025.” [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/state-union/state-union-2025\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/state-union/state-union-2025_en)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living\\_conditions\\_in\\_Europe\\_-\\_poverty\\_and\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion)

# 3 THE PORTO SOCIAL FORUM: A SPACE FOR DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE

The consultation was organised in Porto, Portugal as a side event of the Porto Social Forum, a space dedicated to advancing discussions on the EU's social justice agenda and the development of the new European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan by EU member states leaders. Holding the consultation in this context was both symbolic and practical. Symbolically, it reaffirmed that **the fight against poverty is inseparable from broader struggles for social rights and democracy**. Practically, it enabled the consultation to take place in an environment that values dialogue, collective reflection, and civic engagement.

The Porto Social Forum provided an appropriate backdrop for a consultation that sought to challenge extractive approaches to participation, and instead **promote co-creation, mutual learning, and political agency**. EAPN has consistently argued that anti-poverty policies designed without the meaningful involvement of people experiencing poverty risk being ineffective, disconnected, or harmful. Lived experience offers insights that cannot be captured through data alone: how policies interact on the ground, how administrative barriers operate, how stigma is produced, and how rights are denied or accessed in practice.

The consultation was therefore not conceived as a one-off listening exercise, but as part of a broader effort to ensure that **lived experience shapes the APS from design through implementation and monitoring**. This report reflects that ambition.

# 4 MAINSTREAMING PARTICIPATION ACROSS EAPN'S WORK

## a. PARTICIPATION AS POWER

For EAPN, participation is not an add-on or a procedural requirement. It is a **political principle grounded in the recognition of people experiencing poverty as rights-holders and experts of their own lives**. Participation, in this sense, is about power: the power to influence agendas, shape policies, and hold institutions accountable.

This approach is articulated in EAPN's work on participation, which emphasises that meaningful participation requires:

- early and continuous involvement,
- adequate resources and remuneration,
- accessible and safe spaces,
- and clear feedback and accountability mechanisms.

EAPN operates in a policy environment marked by competing priorities, fiscal rules constraints, the shift of social and welfare spending to militarisation, and growing social inequalities. In this context, participation is often instrumentalised or reduced to symbolic gestures. EAPN actively navigates these risks by insisting on quality standards for participation and by supporting PEP delegates to engage as political actors rather than passive contributors. The consultation in Porto was explicitly framed as a step towards a more permanent participatory governance within the APS, rather than an isolated event.

## b. THE ROLE OF THE PEP COMMITTEE

The need for a comprehensive rights-based approach and a clear definition of poverty, as well as the end of the criminalisation of poverty were consistently highlighted as the baseline from which the upcoming Anti-poverty strategy should work. Moreover, the upcoming APS needs to be integrated across policies to prevent a siloed approach that would not advance poverty eradication, especially when related to the most marginalised groups, such migrants and undocumented groups.

Therefore, throughout the consultation, the **establishment of a PEP Committee** emerged as a central demand and proposal. Such a committee would function as a permanent consultative and monitoring body for the European Commission, ensuring that lived experience informs:

- the design of the APS,
- its implementation at EU and national levels,
- its evaluation over time.

PEP delegates stressed that without such a structure, participation risks remaining anecdotal and extractive. The PEP Committee is therefore not a symbolic request, but a **governance solution to ensure democratic legitimacy and policy effectiveness.**



# 5 FROM PREPARATION TO PARTICIPATION: BUILDING THE CONSULTATION - METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This consultation was designed and implemented in line with EAPN's participation standards, aimed at ensuring that the engagement of people experiencing poverty is meaningful, non-extractive, and empowering. **The consultation combined political preparation, thematic policy workshops, and high-level institutional dialogue.**

To ensure meaningful and accessible participation, interpretation was provided in nine languages, and facilitation methods were adapted to different needs, including those related to stress, or limited prior exposure to institutional settings. This investment in accessibility was a deliberate political choice, recognising that language and format are key determinants of who can participate and how.

In the months prior to the consultation, three **dedicated preparatory sessions** enabled participants to familiarise themselves with the policy context, collectively reflect on priorities, and prepare their contributions. The preparatory sessions also addressed fears and scepticism expressed by delegates, including concerns about whether their contributions would be taken seriously. Through open discussion, EAPN facilitators and delegates reaffirmed collective responsibility, and the importance of speaking both about problems and solutions. Preparation sessions were treated as an integral part of this participation consultation. This approach laid the groundwork for the substantive discussions that followed.

**Thematic workshops** were facilitated using inclusive methods, ensuring balanced participation and safe spaces for exchange. European Commission officials were present in workshops to directly engage with lived experience and policy proposals.

The **consultation meeting** with the EVP Roxana Mînzatu and representatives of DG Employment was preceded by the last half-day preparatory session on 17 September 2025. This session was not limited to logistical briefings; it was designed as a space for collective preparation, trust-building, and political empowerment.

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Delegates received materials in advance and were supported to prepare their interventions, reflect on key messages, and anticipate the dynamics of the consultation with the European Commission. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that all participants, regardless of prior experience, felt supported and confident to contribute.



# 6 VOICES FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

Ahead of the plenary exchange with Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu, participants engaged in **eight thematic workshops**, held in two parallel rounds, which formed the analytical backbone of the consultation. The thematic workshops constituted the core analytical component of the consultation, providing a structured space for people experiencing poverty to articulate lived realities, identify systemic barriers, and **collectively formulate concrete priorities and policy recommendations for the forthcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**. The discussions addressed the following thematic areas: access to enabling and essential services and goods, including food; housing, homelessness and energy poverty; national and local anti-poverty strategies; new risks arising from the digitalisation of the welfare state; governance and participation of people experiencing poverty in the implementation of the APS; active inclusion, including minimum income and labour market integration; intersectionality and discrimination; and in-work poverty and social protection of all workers.

Throughout the workshops, representatives of the European Commission from the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion - directly involved in drafting the upcoming Strategy - actively engaged in the discussions, circulating between groups to listen to lived experience and gather policy-relevant insights. The exchanges moved beyond individual testimonies to collectively analyse patterns of exclusion, governance failures, and policy gaps, while also identifying good practices and solutions. The points below synthesise the main findings and policy implications emerging from these discussions, reflecting the expertise and priorities per thematic workshop articulated by PEPs.

## a. ACCESS TO ENABLING AND ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND GOODS, INCLUDING FOOD

Access to essential services is a cornerstone of social rights and a prerequisite for dignity, inclusion, and participation. Yet for many people experiencing poverty, **services remain fragmented, inaccessible, or conditional, turning rights into privileges**.

Participants highlighted that access to essential services is increasingly uneven across territories and social groups. Lived experience revealed that barriers to healthcare (including mental health and addiction services), dentistry, childcare,

and food support (often not fully reimbursed – which makes them not accessible) - are not isolated shortcomings, but systemic failures that disproportionately affect people in poverty.

Delegates also stressed that civil society organisations and peer-led initiatives often act as de facto service providers, filling gaps left by public systems, while remaining structurally underfunded and excluded from policy design. Municipalities were identified as key access points yet frequently lack adequate resources and coordination with national frameworks. Particularly, participants highlighted that access to rights and services is too often dependent on discretionary interpretation rather than on clear and enforceable legal guarantees. Unclear regulatory frameworks, particularly where provisions rely on non-binding language such as “may” instead of “shall”, create inconsistent practices across territories and leave people experiencing poverty exposed to arbitrariness. Delegates stressed that social workers and service providers are frequently placed in an impossible position, expected to navigate complex and fragmented regulations without adequate training, guidance, or institutional support. This results in unequal treatment, administrative gatekeeping, and people being effectively “lost in the system”.

To address this, the Anti-Poverty Strategy must promote **clear, rights-based legal frameworks, accompanied by mandatory professional training and operational guidance for front-line workers**, ensuring that access to services and benefits is based on entitlement rather than individual interpretation.

Digitalisation was repeatedly described as a double-edged process: while it can improve efficiency and enable automatic access, it often increases non-take-up and exclusion for those without digital skills, equipment, or stable access to the internet. The discussions point to the need for a rights-based, well-resourced, and territorially coordinated approach to essential services within the APS. This includes guarantees of access, sustained investment in civil society and local actors, and safeguards to ensure that digitalisation does not undermine fundamental rights.

### Main key messages and takeaways:

- **Access to essential services is a human rights obligation**, not a discretionary policy choice. Denial of access to healthcare, mental health and addiction services, dentistry, childcare, or food support constitutes a violation of fundamental rights.
- **Multi-level governance must be strengthened, funded and clarified**, with clear responsibilities across EU, national, regional, and local levels, and with particular

support to municipalities as key access points for services. Funding should ensure that some services can be accessible for free.

- **Lived experience and peer-led initiatives must be sustainably funded and recognised as key actors and service providers**, rather than being treated solely as short-term, crisis-response or gap-filling actors when public systems fail.
- **Digitalisation must complement, not replace, human support**, and safeguards must be put in place to prevent increased non-take-up and exclusion.
- **Clear rights-based legal frameworks**, accompanied by mandatory professional training and operational guidance for front-line workers, to avoid arbitrary interpretation of rules and ensure that people are not “lost in the system”.

## **b. HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS, AND ENERGY POVERTY**

Housing is a foundational social right and a prerequisite for dignity, autonomy, and access to all other rights. Experiences of homelessness, housing insecurity, and energy poverty expose the cumulative effects of inadequate social protection, weak regulation, and discriminatory practices. Addressing poverty without securing the right to housing risks perpetuating exclusion and instability.

Participants highlighted the **absence of an integrated and coherent EU approach to homelessness, housing exclusion, and energy poverty**. Delegates shared lived experiences of forced evictions, informal settlements, overcrowded and unsafe housing, and temporary accommodation solutions that fail to provide stability or pathways to autonomy.

Energy poverty emerged as a growing and interlinked challenge, with participants describing situations where inadequate housing conditions, high energy costs, and low incomes combine to undermine health, well-being, and dignity. Elderly people, migrant populations, and families with children were identified as particularly vulnerable groups.

A strong consensus emerged around the **need to move away from emergency-based and temporary responses towards long-term, rights-based housing solutions**. Delegates emphasised that homelessness is not an individual failure, but a systemic one, often reinforced by stigma, aporophobia, and administrative exclusion.

Discussions pointed to the need for a **comprehensive, and preventive approach to the right to adequate housing within the APS**. This includes the adoption of Housing First as a European standard principle, rather than a pilot initiative, extending it beyond homeless to protect all vulnerable groups, and the development

of governance mechanisms that ensure continuity, accountability, and inclusion across policy levels.

Participants stressed that housing solutions must be individualised, holistic, and trust-based, combining access to stable housing with tailored support services, legal status where relevant, and adequate income. Peer-to-peer exchanges between Member States were highlighted as a valuable approach to scale up good practices and avoid fragmented implementation.

### Main key messages and takeaways for the APS:

- **Housing must be recognised and enforced as a fundamental right**, guaranteed through clear multi-level governance responsibilities at EU, national, and local levels.
- **An integrated EU framework on homelessness should be established** within the next Multiannual Financial Framework, moving beyond fragmented and emergency-based approaches.
- **Housing First must be adopted as a European standard**, extending beyond homelessness to protect all vulnerable groups.
- **Member States must be legally obliged to prevent evictions**, and where unavoidable, apply rights-based, protective protocols.
- **Mechanisms are needed to regularise informal settlements while ensuring dignified alternatives**, rather than criminalisation or forced displacement.
- **Energy poverty must be addressed as an integral part of housing policy**, recognising its impact on health, dignity, and social inclusion.
- **People experiencing poverty and civil society organisations must be systematically included** in housing governance, design, and monitoring.
- **Individualised, holistic support programmes** should prioritise trust-building, autonomy, and long-term stability over control and conditionality.
- **Stigma and aporophobia must be explicitly addressed** through a comprehensive, rights-based understanding of poverty.

## **C. NATIONAL AND LOCAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGIES**

National and local anti-poverty strategies are central to translating EU objectives into concrete change on the ground. Without coherent, long-term, and cross-sectoral strategies, anti-poverty efforts risk remaining fragmented, reactive, and unable to address the structural drivers of poverty.

Participants emphasised that poverty is rarely the result of a single policy failure, but of the cumulative effects of gaps across housing, employment, migration,

education, and social protection systems. Lived experience highlighted how **poor coordination between different policy areas leads to people falling through the cracks**, particularly those facing intersecting forms of exclusion.

Delegates shared examples of both promising practices and structural vulnerabilities. The Portuguese experience was cited as an example of how political ownership, structured monitoring, and regular evaluation can strengthen national strategies. At the same time, participants warned that changes in political leadership and priorities can quickly undermine continuity, funding, and implementation.

A recurring concern was the **systematic exclusion of certain groups** - particularly Roma communities, migrants, undocumented, and people without secure residence status - from national anti-poverty strategies due to restrictive eligibility criteria or lack of political recognition. Participants also highlighted the insufficient consideration of how poverty intersects with racism and discrimination, resulting in policies that neglect those most affected.

The discussions point to the need for the APS to actively **promote and support robust national and local strategies that are structural, inclusive, and resilient over time**. This requires clear expectations regarding cross-government coordination, universal reach, and accountability, as well as mechanisms to ensure that lived experience informs strategy design, implementation, and monitoring. Participants stressed that strategies must be protected from short-term political cycles through institutional arrangements, regular monitoring, and transparent evaluation processes. Meaningful involvement of people experiencing poverty - including recognition of their expertise, appropriate training, and fair remuneration - was identified as a condition for both effectiveness and legitimacy.

### Main key messages and takeaways for the APS:

- **Anti-poverty strategies must be structural and cross-sectoral**, addressing root causes such as housing shortages, poor working conditions, discrimination, and lack of regularisation for migrant populations.
- **Strong cross-government coordination is essential**, ensuring coherence across housing, employment, migration, education, and social protection policies.
- **People experiencing poverty must be meaningfully involved** in the design, implementation, and monitoring of strategies, with recognition, training, and remuneration for their expertise.
- **Strategies must ensure universal reach**, explicitly targeting all people in need regardless of residence, migration, or employment status.

- **The intersection between poverty, racism, and discrimination must be addressed**, supported by improved data collection and analysis.
- **National strategies must be safeguarded against political cycles**, through institutional mechanisms, regular monitoring, and transparent accountability frameworks.

### d. **NEW RISKS ARISING FROM THE DIGITALISATION OF THE WELFARE STATE**

Digitalisation is rapidly transforming welfare systems across Europe, with significant implications for access to rights, service delivery, and labour markets. While digital tools can improve efficiency and reach, poorly designed or exclusively digital systems risk deepening exclusion for people experiencing poverty. Addressing digitalisation is therefore essential to ensure that the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy strengthens, rather than undermines, social rights and inclusion.

*“Digitalisation is a problem for PEP because we don't have access to internet and to proper equipment. We should try to maintain the physical help desk. We need physical connections with people.” - PEP delegate from Belgium.*

PEP delegates shared concrete experiences illustrating how **digitalisation has increased barriers to accessing services and benefits**. Online-only procedures, complex digital forms, automated decision-making, and the absence of human contact were repeatedly described as exclusionary. These barriers disproportionately affect older persons, people with disabilities, people with low literacy or digital skills, and those in unstable housing situations who lack regular access to digital tools or connectivity.

Participants highlighted that digitalisation has significantly contributed to the non-take-up of benefits, as individuals are unable to navigate digital systems, do not understand eligibility criteria, or are discouraged by repeated administrative failures. At the same time, delegates expressed concerns about the broader social and employment impacts of digitalisation, including the reduction of job opportunities in essential services and the erosion of trust caused by the loss of human interaction in welfare provision. While critical of current practices, participants also recognised that **digitalisation can offer opportunities if designed inclusively**. Automatic allocation of benefits, proactive outreach, and simplified procedures were identified as positive examples - provided they are accompanied by strong safeguards, transparency, and human support.

Discussions underlined the need for the APS to explicitly **address digitalisation as both a social risk and a potential enabler of rights**. Digital-by-default approaches must be avoided, and welfare systems should guarantee parallel, human-centred access pathways. The APS should also ensure that EU funding supports digital inclusion, including skills development and access to equipment, while systematically assessing the impact of digital reforms on non-take-up, exclusion, and inequality.

### Main key messages and takeaways for the APS:

- **Digitalisation must be recognised as both a social risk and an opportunity**, with explicit safeguards to prevent exclusion and rights violations.
- **Digital-by-default welfare systems should be avoided**; access to benefits and services must always include non-digital and human-centred alternatives.
- **Guaranteed human assistance is essential**, ensuring that social workers and service providers complement digital tools rather than being replaced by them.
- **EU funding should support digital inclusion**, including digital literacy, skills training, and access to equipment and connectivity for people experiencing poverty.
- **The impact of digitalisation on non-take-up, exclusion, and employment must be systematically assessed**, with corrective measures built into policy design.
- **Automatic benefit allocation and proactive outreach should be explored**, provided they are rights-based, transparent, and inclusive.

## **e. ACTIVE INCLUSION: MINIMUM INCOME AND LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION**

Adequate income support and access to decent work are central pillars of poverty eradication. Active inclusion policies are intended to provide security while supporting pathways to social and economic participation. However, when minimum income schemes are inadequate, conditional, or punitive, they risk reinforcing poverty, stigma, and exclusion rather than enabling inclusion.

Participants shared strong and often painful experiences related to accessing minimum income and other non-contributory benefits. Delegates described systems characterised by low adequacy, repeated reassessments, complex administrative procedures, and punitive conditionality. Rather than providing stability, these mechanisms create constant insecurity and pressure, trapping people in poverty.

Stigma emerged as a central issue. Participants highlighted how **benefit systems often treat people experiencing poverty with suspicion**, framing support

as a favour rather than a right. In some cases, income support was described as used as a tool of control or punishment, including situations where access to minimum income was linked to threats regarding child custody or compliance with unrealistic behavioural requirements. These practices were reported to have severe mental health impacts and to undermine trust in public institutions.

*“Escaping poverty is more complex than providing money and financial assistance. We need to ensure access to documents and stable housing.” - PEP delegate from Italy.*

Migrants and other excluded groups were identified as particularly affected by restrictive eligibility criteria, residence requirements, and repeated reapplication procedures. Delegates stressed that many people entitled to support are effectively excluded, while others in low-paid or insecure work face barriers that prevent them from accessing income support when needed.

Participants also emphasised that access to employment cannot be reduced to activation measures alone. Forced participation in unsuitable training or low-quality jobs was widely criticised. Instead, **employment support must respect individual needs, aspirations, and life situations, including health conditions and care responsibilities**. The lack of recognition of unpaid care work, particularly affecting women, was identified as a major barrier to labour market participation.

The discussions highlighted the need for the APS to **reaffirm active inclusion as a rights-based approach, grounded in dignity, adequacy, and autonomy**. Minimum income schemes should provide real protection against poverty and act as a stable foundation, not a disciplinary tool. Administrative simplification, reduced conditionality, and universal access are essential to prevent exclusion and non-take-up.

*“I come from a wealthy state, and still almost 20% of the population are at risk of poverty. We need standards on wages and income.” - PEP delegate from Austria*

Participants stressed that labour market integration policies must be supportive rather than coercive, backed by adequate service capacity and access to enabling services such as childcare, training, and counselling. Recognition of unpaid care work and life-course realities should be integral to active inclusion frameworks.

### Main key messages and takeaways for the APS:

- **Minimum income schemes must be universal, adequate, and grounded in human rights**, guaranteeing dignity and security rather than enforcing behavioural control.
- **Punitive and ideological conditionality must be rejected**, as it reinforces stigma, harms mental health, and traps people in poverty.
- **Administrative and eligibility barriers must be reduced and simplified**, particularly for migrants and other groups currently excluded from income support.
- **Access to income support must be inclusive**, regardless of residence or employment status, including for people in low-paid or insecure work.
- **Employment support must be tailored and rights-based**, respecting individual needs, preferences, health conditions, and aspirations.
- **Unpaid care work must be recognised**, and access to enabling services, such as childcare, must be guaranteed as part of labour market integration.

## **f. INTERSECTIONALITY AND DISCRIMINATION**

Poverty does not occur in isolation. It is shaped and reinforced by multiple, and intersecting forms of discrimination related to ethnicity, gender, migration status, disability, age, religion, and socio-economic background. Addressing poverty without tackling discrimination risks reproducing exclusion and leaving the most marginalised groups invisible within policy frameworks. An effective EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must therefore adopt an **intersectional and anti-discriminatory approach**.

Delegates emphasised that **people experiencing poverty are frequently subjected to overlapping forms of discrimination** that compound exclusion from services, employment, education, housing, and justice. Roma communities were repeatedly cited as facing particularly severe and persistent discrimination, resulting in disproportionate exposure to poverty, poor living conditions, and administrative exclusion.

*"I grew up as a Roma in Ireland. 20% of Roma live in extreme poverty in Ireland, and over 80% are unemployed. We need to make connections between mainstream policies and anti-poverty measures, such as ensuring links with the Roma Strategy." - PEP delegate from Ireland*

Participants also highlighted that **socio-economic status is rarely recognised as a ground for discrimination**, despite its clear impact on stigma, unequal treatment, and mental health. Experiences of discrimination in access to healthcare, education, employment, and public services were widely shared, often linked to assumptions, stereotyping, and lack of institutional accountability. A recurring concern was the **absence of reliable, disaggregated data** on groups that are overrepresented among people experiencing poverty, including ethnic minorities and migrants. This data gap contributes to policy blind spots and allows structural inequalities to remain unaddressed.

Delegates also stressed that discrimination is reinforced by fragmented governance. Poor coordination between services, lack of accountability mechanisms, and insufficient support for front-line actors - including social workers, civil society organisations, and community-led initiatives - were identified as major barriers to inclusion. The lack of meaningful involvement of end users in service design further perpetuates mistrust and ineffective responses. The discussions highlighted the need for the APS to **explicitly recognise and address discrimination as a structural driver of poverty**. This requires legal recognition of socio-economic discrimination, improved data collection, and coherent integration of anti-discrimination principles across EU and national policies.

Participants stressed that tackling discrimination also demands **investment in people and systems**: training of service providers, involvement of end users in policy and service design, and adequate funding to reduce territorial inequalities affecting social mobility and democratic participation. **Stronger coordination between EU strategic frameworks** - such as the EU Roma Strategic Framework, the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, and the APS - was identified as essential to ensure coherence and mutual reinforcement.

### Main key messages and takeaways:

- **Socio-economic status must be recognised as a ground for discrimination**, alongside ethnicity, gender, disability, migration status, religion, and age.
- **Discrimination in access to services must be actively addressed**, including in healthcare, education, employment, housing, and justice systems.
- **Systematic collection and use of disaggregated data is essential** to make structural inequalities visible and inform effective policies, while respecting fundamental rights.
- **Policy coherence across EU strategic frameworks must be strengthened**, ensuring alignment between the APS, the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan, and the EU Roma Strategic Framework.

- **Service providers and front-line actors must receive adequate training and support**, with active involvement of end users in service design and evaluation.
- **Civil society and community-led initiatives must be recognised and resourced** as key actors in combating discrimination and supporting inclusion.
- **Territorial inequalities must be addressed through adequate funding**, particularly to reduce disparities between regions, cities, and peripheral areas.
- **Universal access to social benefits, including child benefits, must be ensured**, regardless of residence or migration status.
- **Strong accountability and monitoring mechanisms are needed**, including regular coordination bodies and representation of people experiencing poverty.

## g. IN-WORK POVERTY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION OF ALL WORKERS

Lived experiences of in-work poverty challenges the assumption that employment alone provides protection from poverty. Increasingly, **employed individuals experience poverty due to low wages, precarious contracts, inadequate social protection, and unequal access to services**. Addressing in-work poverty is therefore essential to ensuring that work provides dignity, security, and real pathways out of poverty. Delegates shared lived experiences illustrating how precarious employment, low pay, unstable working hours, and weak labour protections contribute to persistent poverty among working people. Participants highlighted that short-term contracts, involuntary part-time work, and bogus self-employment leave workers exposed to income instability and limited access to social rights.

*“It will take 5 generations to leave poverty. In my case, we all helped each other in the family, and it paid off”. - PEP delegate from Portugal.*

**Gendered inequalities** emerged as a central concern. Delegates stressed that unpaid and informal care work -overwhelmingly carried out by women<sup>3</sup> - significantly limits access to stable employment, career progression, and adequate pensions. This situation was framed not as an individual choice, but as a structural failure of social and care systems.

**Age discrimination** was also identified as a driver of in-work poverty and insecurity, affecting both younger workers entering the labour market and older workers facing barriers to decent employment and re-skilling. **Migrant workers** were reported to face additional barriers due to residence-based conditionality

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.age-platform.eu/eu-care-strategy-europe-must-show-it-cares-about-older-women/#:~:text=An%20estimated%2080%25%20of%20long,of%20informal%20carers%20are%2045%2B.>

limiting access to social protection. Participants further emphasised the vulnerability of working households during periods of crisis, such as sharp increases in living or energy costs. The abrupt loss of benefits when entering employment, combined with high upfront costs (e.g. rent deposits and other housing-related expenses), were described as major obstacles to transition out of poverty.

The discussions highlighted the need for the APS to **address in-work poverty through a combination of labour market regulation, adequate social protection, and access to enabling services**. Strengthened implementation of existing EU instruments, such as the Minimum Wage Directive and the Council Recommendation on Adequate Minimum Income, was identified as essential to ensure fair wages and income security across Member States. Participants stressed that social protection systems must support, rather than penalise, transitions into work. Mechanisms allowing the continuation of benefits during employment transitions and periods of acute cost-of-living crisis were identified as effective tools to prevent poverty traps. Access to childcare, upskilling opportunities, and lifelong learning were also highlighted as critical to enabling sustainable labour market participation.

### Main key messages and takeaways:

- **Employment must guarantee protection from poverty**, requiring fair wages, stable contracts, and adequate social protection.
- **The Minimum Wage Directive and the Council Recommendation on Adequate Minimum Income must be fully and consistently implemented** across all Member States.
- **Social benefits must continue during transitions into work and during crises**, preventing income shocks and poverty traps.
- **Unpaid and informal care work must be recognised**, with access to services such as childcare and measures to ensure adequate pensions, particularly for women.
- **Age and gender-based discrimination must be actively addressed**, including through access to re-skilling and lifelong learning.
- **The right to upskilling and acquisition of new competences must be ensured** for all workers, particularly those in precarious employment.
- **Migrant workers must have equal access to social protection**, without residence-based conditionality that reinforces exclusion.

## h. GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION OF PEP IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE APS

Meaningful participation is not a procedural supplement but a governance condition for effective, legitimate, and accountable anti-poverty policy. Without the continuous involvement of people experiencing poverty, policies risk being disconnected from reality, extractive in nature, and ineffective in addressing structural drivers of poverty. For the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy to deliver on its ambition, **participation must therefore be institutionalised, resourced, and protected from political cycles**. Across all discussions, delegates consistently identified governance and participation as cross-cutting issues shaping the success or failure of anti-poverty policies. Participants described a persistent recognition gap, whereby lived experience is undervalued compared to institutional, academic, or technical expertise. Participation was often experienced as symbolic, underfunded, time-limited, and disconnected from real decision-making processes.

Delegates highlighted that existing participation initiatives, such as national poverty networks, parliamentary-level dialogues, and PEP conferences, demonstrate the value of lived experience in shaping policy debates. However, these practices were described as fragile and overly dependent on political goodwill, short-term funding, or individual champions. Structural barriers to participation were repeatedly raised, including language obstacles, lack of interpretation, financial constraints, gatekeeping practices, and formal qualification requirements that exclude people with lived experience from policy spaces. Participants also stressed the isolation many PEPs face, underlining the importance of peer-to-peer exchange and collective spaces to build confidence, shared analysis, and solidarity.

The discussions clearly indicated that participation must move from ad hoc consultations towards a **full-cycle, institutionalised governance approach**. Participants strongly advocated for the establishment of a **permanent People Experiencing Poverty (PEP) Committee** linked to the EU APS, ensuring continuous involvement in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Strategy. Delegates stressed that such a structure must be accompanied by **clear standards, adequate resources, and accountability mechanisms**. Participation should extend beyond social policy alone, enabling dialogue with policymakers across interconnected areas such as housing, energy, transport, and digitalisation. National-level frameworks were also identified as essential to guarantee participation regardless of changes in government or political priorities.

### Main key messages and takeaways:

- **Participation of people experiencing poverty must be institutionalised across the full policy cycle**, from design to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the APS.
- **A permanent PEP Committee should be established at EU level**, linked to the APS, as a governance mechanism rather than a consultative add-on.
- **Lived experience must be recognised as expertise**, with fair financial remuneration for time and contributions.
- **Accessibility must be guaranteed**, including interpretation, accessible formats, and the removal of qualification-based barriers to participation.
- **Peer-to-peer exchange and regional PEP networks should be supported**, strengthening representation, solidarity, and shared learning.
- **Robust feedback and accountability mechanisms are essential**, ensuring that PEP contributions meaningfully inform policy decisions.
- **EU-wide participation standards and peer-learning frameworks should be developed**, avoiding fragmented and unequal approaches across Member States.
- **National participation frameworks must protect PEP involvement from political cycles**, ensuring continuity and legitimacy over time.

## 7 CENTRING LIVED EXPERIENCE IN THE APS: PLENARY DIALOGUE WITH THE EVP

The plenary exchange with Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu represented a significant moment of direct dialogue between people experiencing poverty and the European Commission. Beyond testimonies, the session functioned as a space of mutual accountability, where people experiencing poverty directly confronted EU decision-makers with the lived consequences of policy choices and systemic failures. More than twenty delegates from across Member States intervened, sharing experiences of homelessness, discrimination, digital exclusion, precarious work, inadequate services, and intergenerational poverty. These interventions collectively challenged narrow or technocratic definitions of poverty, reframing it instead as a **multidimensional and structural phenomenon rooted in political decisions, governance gaps, and unequal power relations**. Several core messages emerged clearly from the plenary:

First, **poverty is inseparable from dignity and rights**. Delegates consistently emphasised that poverty is not only about income deprivation, but about humiliation, stigma, loss of autonomy, and denial of fundamental rights.

Second, **housing was affirmed as a foundational social right**. Testimonies from delegates with lived experience of homelessness underscored that without stable and adequate housing, access to employment, healthcare, education, and social participation becomes virtually impossible. This framing resonated with the EVP's acknowledgment of housing as a priority area and its link to the European Affordable Housing Plan.

Third, **participation was framed as a condition for policy effectiveness**, not merely a democratic ideal. Multiple delegates stressed that policies designed without the continuous involvement of people experiencing poverty systematically fail to reach those most in need, reproduce exclusion, and generate harm. In her responses, Executive Vice-President Mînzatu acknowledged the importance of these contributions, the political urgency of tackling poverty and the role of EU-level frameworks in driving change at national level.

*“The ambition and credibility of the Anti-Poverty Strategy will depend on how clearly the seriousness of poverty is articulated and addressed. Europe is weak if it does not tackle poverty.” - Roxana Mînzatu, EU Executive Vice-President.*

At the same time, delegates raised concerns about the risk of consultations remaining symbolic if not followed by concrete structural mechanisms. They emphasised the importance of adopting a comprehensive definition of poverty and called for an end to the criminalisation of people experiencing poverty. Several delegates explicitly called for the creation of a **permanent PEP Committee**, stressing that without structural follow-up, consultations risk losing credibility. Remuneration of lived-experience expertise, and feedback on how contributions would influence the APS were central to this accountability dynamic. This plenary therefore represented not only an exchange of views, but a political signal: **people experiencing poverty are ready and willing to engage as partners in policymaking**, and they expect institutions to create the conditions for that engagement to be meaningful, continuous, and influential.



# 8 CONCLUSIONS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

## a. KEY MESSAGES FROM PEP DELEGATES

Three overarching messages emerged from the consultation:

### 1. Poverty eradication as a political choice

The consultation reaffirmed that poverty eradication is fundamentally a political choice. Across all discussions, delegates highlighted that poverty persists not due to a lack of knowledge, but due to policy priorities, governance failures, and insufficient investment in social rights. The commitment to eradicate poverty by 2050 therefore requires a strategy that is **ambitious, adequately resourced, and embedded across all relevant policy areas**, including housing, employment, digitalisation, migration, energy, and social protection.

A fragmented or siloed approach risks reproducing exclusion, particularly for those facing intersecting forms of discrimination. The APS must therefore adopt a comprehensive, intersectional, and rights-based framework that explicitly targets structural drivers of poverty.

### 2. Lived experience as recognised expertise

A central conclusion of the consultation is that lived experience constitutes a form of expertise that is indispensable to effective policymaking. People experiencing poverty bring unique knowledge about how policies operate in practice, where systems fail, and how rights are denied or accessed on the ground. Recognising this expertise requires **moving beyond symbolic participation towards concrete measures**, including:

- formal recognition of lived experience as expert input,
- remuneration equivalent to other forms of expertise,
- accessible formats, interpretation, and support,
- and safeguards against extractive or tokenistic engagement.

Without these conditions, participation risks reinforcing existing power imbalances rather than challenging them and the APS risks falling short of its ambition to eradicate poverty in Europe.

### 3. From consultation to governance: proposal for a PEP Committee

To ensure that lived experience meaningfully shapes the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy over time, participants strongly advocated for the establishment of a **People Experiencing Poverty (PEP) Committee** linked to the APS. The proposed PEP Committee would serve as a **permanent consultative and monitoring body**, ensuring continuous involvement of people experiencing poverty throughout the full policy cycle by:

- Advising the European Commission on the design, implementation, and evaluation of the APS;
- Monitoring the impact of APS-related policies at EU and national levels;
- Providing feedback on implementation gaps and unintended consequences. Institutions must demonstrate how input is used and provide feedback.;
- Contributing to the development of indicators and evaluation frameworks;
- Ensuring accountability through regular dialogue with DG EMPL and other relevant services.



# 9 FINAL REFLECTIONS

The European Commission Consultation with People Experiencing Poverty (PEP) demonstrated that people experiencing poverty are not only willing but fully capable of contributing to complex policy discussions when given the appropriate conditions. Their contributions offer critical guidance for shaping an Anti-Poverty Strategy that is grounded in reality, responsive to lived experience, and capable of delivering on the EU's ambition to eradicate poverty.

Moving forward, the challenge for EU institutions is not whether to involve people experiencing poverty, **but how to do so in a way that redistributes power, builds trust, and delivers tangible change.** The APS represents a unique opportunity to set a new standard for participatory governance in EU social policy. Failing to seize this opportunity would risk undermining both the effectiveness of the strategy and the credibility of the Union's commitment to social justice.



