



# ACTION PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

## Conference Report

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**EAPN**  
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REDE EUROPEIA ANTI-POBREZA

## INTRODUCTION:

In November 2017, European leaders announced the European Pillar of Social Rights. A document of principles intended to ensure upward convergence between Member States, with better integration of social objectives. The European Pillar came at a time when Europe was still facing challenges resulting from the previous crisis and, therefore, the focus on promoting social rights was the right way to strengthen Europe from a social, and from an economic point of view. However, there was still a need to leave the domain of principles and act. A turning point was when the new European Commission announced in 2019 that implementation of the Pillar *confirms the commitment, made at the highest level, that people are at the centre of concerns, regardless of change, and that no one is left behind*<sup>1</sup>. The Commission will most likely present in March 2021 an Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the context of recovering from a new crisis that started with the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic hitting Europe and the world in 2020. The launch of this Action Plan will fall into the Portuguese EU Council Presidency which plans an event on 7 May 2021 in Porto to solemnly proclaim it. The Portuguese Presidency indicates that we must give concrete *meaning to the European Pillar in the lives of citizens*, but the “translation” of this is still a concern: do we stay only in terms of guidelines and recommendations?

In June 2020 EAPN issued the Position Paper “Input to the consultation on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights”, setting out the EAPN proposals for an Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). EAPN calls for 1) reinforcing adequate income (quality jobs with fair living wages and minimum income and social protection income support), and 2) improving the access to key public and essential services (public health and care services, education, training and lifelong learning and social, affordable housing), not least to have a social and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 epidemic. EAPN explains the need for a high-profile Action Plan proposing soft and hard law measures and containing a clear timetable at EU and national level. It should also help mapping progress towards obligatory social rights that guarantee basic living standards for all EU residents. For EAPN, the Action Plan should include a renewed EU strategy to fight poverty with an ambitious poverty reduction target as the overarching goal to frame it. EAPN formulates seven EU-level pre-requisites we deem necessary for a successful Action Plan. The EAPN input built on earlier work on the EPSR<sup>2</sup>.

The Action Plan must have a European and, above all, national dimension and foresee legislative and non-legislative initiatives on both levels. We urgently need to reflect and guide our action to promote measures aimed at **strengthening adequate income** (quality jobs with fair wages that guarantee a decent life and minimum income and support for social protection income) **and access to the main public and essential services** (public health and care services, education, training and lifelong learning and affordable housing).

Regarding adequate minimum income, Portugal publicly took a favourable position in May 2020, which aimed at defining at EU-level common principles and minimum requirements for national minimum income systems to effectively combat poverty and social exclusion in an ambitious and integrated perspective. However, we are seeing some silence in the current Presidency on

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0014&qid=1580400520904>

<sup>2</sup> [Last Chance for Social Europe](#) (2016); Response to the EPSR [Making Social Rights the beating heart of Europe](#) (2017); [Response to the Social Fairness Package: Making a difference to people in poverty](#) (2018)

this matter. The Council Conclusions on Minimum Income Protection adopted in October 2020 in the context of the German EU Council Presidency comprise a set of recommendations and guidelines to the European Commission, to different European bodies and to Member States for the reinforcement of the minimum income protection as a way of combating poverty. It also called on the European Commission *to initiate an update of the existing EU framework on minimum income to effectively support and complement Member States' policies on national minimum income schemes and benefits and to propose a Framework Directive*. How does Portugal position itself in relation to the proposals left in this matter by the previous Presidency?

Portugal also presents a favourable scenario since it is preparing a National Strategy to Combat Poverty based on the European Pillar of Social Rights, but an action plan does not end here. EAPN has always argued that the Action Plan of the EPSR should include an EU strategy to combat poverty as a global objective and a comprehensive framework for the Action Plan, with an ambitious objective for the eradication of poverty<sup>3</sup>. The Europe 2020 Strategy set an EU poverty target to reduce poverty by at least 20 million people by 2020. The poverty target was crucial, however, it failed to reduce poverty by more than 8 million. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe and the world, more than 109 million people were still at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU 28. For EAPN, adopting a new EU anti-poverty strategy and setting a new ambitious EU poverty target must be an overwhelming EU priority for an inclusive recovery in all EU Member States. For EAPN, such an EU poverty reduction target should 1) be more, not less ambitious than the old one, 2) be formulated as a percentage target applied equally to all EU MS, 3) capture the multidimensionality of poverty, 4) ensure continuity and comparability with current EU poverty indicators, 5) be complemented by an inequality target and 6) be supported by additional indicators/targets to capture extreme poverty.

What commitments Portugal and the EU Member States in general will assume in the implementation of the Action Plan is a central question that we must ask. What role is there for the participation of civil society alongside other stakeholders? And for the people experiencing poverty?

This Policy Conference aims to be a contribution to the reflection of what we can and must promote at the national level, but also at the European level. How can we use in 2021 and beyond the Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, without leaving anyone behind and aiming at an effective fight against poverty and social exclusion?

**How can we best use it to reduce poverty and social exclusion and to improve the access to and quality of public services for all? How can we best give a role and voice to people experiencing poverty?**

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<sup>3</sup> (June 2020); [EAPN Response to the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020 and the Joint Employment Report 2020](#) (January 2020); [EAPN Position Paper "Delivering Agenda 2030 for people and planet: EAPN proposals for a post Europe 2020 strategy"](#) (September 2019)

## **OPENING SESSION**

**Jardim Moreira**

**President of EAPN Portugal**

Jardim Moreira highlighted the fragility of the system we currently live in, worsen by the pandemic crisis. Despite the investments made, we continue to need concerted action to tackle the structural causes of poverty and inequalities. Otherwise, we will never be able to change the paradigm that brought us here, even with millions of people living without having their social rights guaranteed.

The organization of this conference, just a few months from the Social Summit in Porto, is for EAPN Portugal an important milestone in the advocacy of a social system that invests on people, which values the human capital built on several decades in what we today call the European Union.

The crisis we are facing today caused by a public health crisis has come to tell us that we need a Union that protects citizens in health, social protection, employment, and housing. The sovereignty of member states exists and must be respected, and we can never forget the principle of subsidiarity, defined in article 5 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). However, we must endeavour for common minimums among member states so that we can guarantee social and territorial cohesion, while maintaining social peace.

The Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights requires a strong commitment from all Member States that includes an effective application of the funds that are about to arrive, a holistic view on social problems and on intervention with families, an ambitious national and European goal of poverty reduction and increased investment in social protection systems, in a more adequate, accessible, and empowering minimum income.

Jardim Moreira ended his speech by calling for the creation of a good governance strategy capable of involving all citizens, namely the most vulnerable, as only in this way will it be possible to build a Social Europe in which the social rights of all citizens are guaranteed.

**Mariana Vieira da Silva**

**Minister of State for the Presidency**

Mariana Vieira da Silva presented the Government's measures to respond to the pandemic crisis with a considerable financial impact that would make it possible to reach everyone (lay-off, extend unemployment benefit, unemployment social benefit, RSI, additional payment to family allowance, etc.). She reinforced the fact that the current crisis is cruel from an economic point of view and that efforts were made to act immediately (e.g., schools were closed, but maintained open in their social dimension). She also highlighted the social impacts of the pandemic in areas such as education, qualification, employment, health, mental health, income. The structural dimension of the pandemic requires a long-term response, and it is more difficult to resolve.

The challenge now is: what economy will we return to and what model of society will we defend after the pandemic? "In 2019 we had the best indicators of poverty and social exclusion in our

democracy". We know that we are going to have backwards, but the numbers for 2019 also allow us to highlight that "policies produce results". Designing a "strategy to combat poverty" also requires looking at "measures that have produced good results, knowing what they are and knowing what remains to be done".

In this regard, the Minister stressed that we must invest in policy-making instruments such as the Action Plan for the implementation of the EPSR, with its employment, poverty, and qualification goals.

Central at the time the Government is finalizing the Recovery and Resilience Program and the multiannual financial framework. The RRP is a great challenge, as Portugal has never had so many resources. The Government is investing on "the digital and climate transition and on ensuring that it is a fair transition" and that "Society and the Economy are stronger to face these challenges". The "dimension of resilience is the most relevant in our RRP". "A stronger welfare state, so that it can lift the population out of poverty and ensure the conditions necessary for the realization of their life projects for the middle class".

The Minister thus highlighted a set of key ideas that are part of the RRP in areas such as health, the new social responses, intervention in severe poverty areas/territories such as those that exist in metropolitan areas, access to housing and qualifications.

We have a lot of work ahead of us in the recovery of our country and that the country looks at this recovery also to ensure that everyone has opportunities. Having a society and an economy that is more resistant to crises and that all citizens can participate in were some of the Minister's final messages.

#### **ROUND TABLE: THE ACTION PLAN OF THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS: WHAT CONCRETE MEANING IN THE LIVES OF THE CITIZENS?**

**Chair: Sandra Monteiro, Le Monde Diplomatique**

**Katarina Ivanković-Knežević**

**Director of Social Affairs, DG EMPL, European Commission**

Social Europe is important for a fair transition and recovery. This focus will guide policy at the European level, but also at member states level. The Action Plan also includes additional focuses on green, digital, and demographic transitions. The 20 principles considered in the Pillar are the guide to a strong social Europe and set the vision for a new social *rulebook*.

The key objectives of the Action Plan are translated, at first, into operationalizing the principles; in a second step in establishing the basis for the new targets for 2030; thirdly, to divide actions into priority areas (more and better jobs; skills and equality and protection and social inclusion) and finally, to guide the implementation of the Pillar at national, regional, and local levels. In the latter case, there are determining factors such as funding opportunities, the reinforcement of monitoring, coordination and implementation, the reinforcement of the social dialogue and the involvement of civil society.

Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic highlighted the role that the Portuguese Presidency can play in reinforcing the commitment of the remaining Member States in finalizing the negotiations. She also highlighted the changes introduced in the panel of social indicators that now include more indicators that allow monitoring the achievement of the established objectives.

The Commission wants a joint responsibility from all member states to comply with the Pillar, since they are primarily responsible for the areas of employment, education, and social policies. In any case, the Commission provides new support and guidance tools for action at national level, particularly in the following fields to tackle poverty and social exclusion, such as The Recommendation for the establishment of Child Guarantee; the European Platform on Combating Homelessness and the Affordable Housing Initiative; Guidance Notices on Public Procurement of Innovation and on Socially Responsible Public Procurement; the Council Recommendation on minimum income and the European Report on access to essential services

Regarding social protection, the Commission will establish a group of experts at the highest level that will produce a report by the end of 2022. Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic hopes that it will be possible to come up with more innovative approaches in the field of social protection and reflect on the future of protection and how the pandemic was impacted in the social protection system.

There is a whole variety of other relevant initiatives ranging from the joint report on the application of the Employment Equality Directive and the Racial Equality Directive, to the proposal for the directive on the minimum wage and the action plan for the social economy.

Civil society is very important for implementing EPSR on the ground. On the one hand, they provide support services to citizens and represent the voice of people living in the most vulnerable situations. The Commission will foster communication and the involvement of all stakeholders on the implementation of the Pillar and will encourage MS to organize coordination mechanisms for the involvement of all stakeholders at the national level.

It is equally important to ensure that all investments work well together: MFF 2021-2027, the Next Generation EU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the ESF +. These plans explain where these funds will be spent and how they contribute to the implementation of the Pillar. Some member states are taking these social aspects into account and the Commission is still in negotiations until April 15, where the majority of the RRP are expected to be handed over to the Commission.

From the point of view of the ESF +: at least 25% must be spent on social inclusion; 3% to support those who are in a situation of deprivation, 5% for child poverty. Percentage that is not for all member states, but for those that are above the AROPE average (11 MS are in this situation); 12.5% for youth unemployment; 0.25% for the training of civil society and social partners and 675 million dedicated to employment and social innovation.

Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic ended her presentation by highlighting the results of the Eurobarometer, in which 76% of the citizens surveyed agreed that the implementation of the pillar at the level of the member states is very important. She also highlighted the importance of the Porto Social Summit of 7 and 8 May as Member States will endorse the Action Plan.

**Edmundo Martinho**

## **Coordinator of the Portuguese National Strategy to Fight Poverty**

Edmundo Martinho started by highlighting the fact that little progress has been made on the European Pillar of Social Rights since it was launched in 2017. In this sense, the action plan is crucial for the *consolidation of a Social Europe*. Much has changed in Europe in recent years, and the current pressure of the pandemic on the systems is also decisive for the *hardening of living conditions and the emergence of many situations of poverty*. That is why the Plan is crucial and appears to increase our ambition. The current weaknesses are more visible not only because they have become more acute, but *because the systems' inability to respond to them has been uncovered*. The existence of an effective and strong social protection system is essential to respond to crises such as this and others that may arise. The path established by the Pillar Action Plan is the correct one since there is a commitment for member states to consolidate their protection states.

We need to take advantage of the Action Plan and to know, with the concrete goals it presents, to achieve the best ways to achieve direct impacts on the lives of citizens. The Action Plan can represent an advance in terms of growth and cohesion of societies.

The Plan also sustains two essential dimensions: on the one hand, the endorsement of public responsibility in the set areas. In addition to collective responsibility, there is the responsibility of member states, although still in the field of soft law. Another dimension has to do with the role of different actors and all sectors of society to be involved from the beginning. In the specific case of Portugal, the Government's decision to move forward with a National Strategy to combat poverty is positive for this action plan. The Strategy has been participative. One of the axes of the strategy will have to do with the *basis of the fight against poverty as a national purpose* that goes beyond the responsibility of the State. It is the only way to succeed.

*We have a renewed and particularly strong instrument at hand*, and the initiatives presented by the Commission are essential to have a significant impact on the lives of the citizens. Intervention in the causes of poverty is essential and one of the ways to do this is to ensure that children have all life conditions guaranteed. Child poverty is not a mere consequence of family poverty and, therefore, until 2030 it is essential to change the model that has been adopted in recent years. The target set itself, for example, in the case of children should also be graded as the situation of poverty is different in terms of groups of children (emphasis given to children aged 15 to 18) and solutions must be found most appropriate to each of the situations.

With the action plan, Europe takes as a priority the consolidation of Social Europe and the consolidation of social rights. It is up to the Member States to work so that it has an impact on the lives of citizens and not to miss this opportunity, which is unique in providing some response in central areas of our society. *The ex-ante impact assessment* is central from a methodological point of view, as well as the revision of the indicator panel is essential for monitoring and *introducing changing measures in time so that the plan is more effective*. *The commitment of all stakeholders is essential*.

**Graciela Malgesini**

## EU and Advocacy Officer, EAPN Spain and Co-chair EUISG

Graciela first highlighted the panorama of poverty before the COVID-19 Pandemic, stressing the vulnerability of some groups such as women, children, single-parent families, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, people in situations of poverty, homeless people, and Roma communities. The risk of poverty and social exclusion is a reality for some 18 million children in the EU and about 24 million of the population is in severe material deprivation.

Pre-covid poverty can be characterized in 5 ways: present in all member states and severely in some countries and regions; chronic, female, single parent; and ethnic, that is, with a greater incidence in the foreign population and minorities. There is also a greater incidence in the youth population and people with disabilities. EAPN has always advocated a multidimensional approach to poverty because the economic causes of poverty are diverse, but there are also a set of transversal determinants that further complicate the causes and the phenomenon. In terms of profiles, there are two “new profiles” of poverty: on the one hand, people who fell into poverty during the 2008 crisis, who have recovered, but meanwhile have fallen back into poverty; and on the other hand, people who were, for the first time, in a situation of poverty and / or in a situation of material deprivation.

In view of the panorama of poverty Graciela said that it is possible to point out 5 trends of this *(new) social crisis*: the increase in severe material deprivation; the worsening of gender inequality and poverty; the increase in homelessness; increasing the distance between children who are poor and those who are not; and the widening of precariousness and low quality of employment. For all these reasons, there is a clear risk that the number of people in poverty, which is now 92.4 million, may increase to 125 million in the coming years. The reality of poverty and the threat of being in poverty in the near future is worrying and that is why Graciela mentioned the urgency of the European Union's support and National Governments to be held responsible to come up with solutions. *We need to move forward on social rights and the creation of a cohesive and inclusive society for all that includes the implementation of the Revised European Social Charter.*

The Plan for the implementation of EPSR is, therefore, welcomed by EAPN Europe and long awaited since its proclamation in 2017, where the promise was made that a unique Model of a Social and Economic Europe brings prosperity and opportunities for all. The plan contains political tools and legal initiatives alongside the established goals and objectives. But Graciela questioned whether the poverty reduction target set out in the plan is ambitious enough?! Looking at the concerns of the EAPN, as a network of Organizations that work with people in poverty, it is questionable whether the *goal established 10 years ago is enough and if we are not leaving anyone behind?!* She said: “We are concerned that when the situation worsens, the poverty reduction target is reduced.”

Graciela thus highlighted the concerns of the EAPN regarding some aspects that are still missing, namely, the non-existence of a target concerning the employment of young people who were severely affected in the pandemic; that the employment orientation is clearly an orientation towards decent employment; and, finally, that non-digital alternatives for the provision of services be taken into account in order to guarantee the accessibility of services for all and the fact that a concrete goal of reducing school drop-out is still lacking.

Regarding the Minimum Income principle, Graciela highlighted the fact that the Plan is unfortunately no longer ambitious in this matter, especially considering the impact of the pandemic on the reduction of people's income. EAPN continues to defend a European Directive on Adequate Minimum Income. Graciela highlighted the recent example of Spain in relation to the Minimum Vital Income, which took a relevant role in reducing the severity of poverty and left the challenge that it can be a good practice to test *a future European minimum income scheme*.

Despite all the initiatives presented under the Action Plan, there is still an imbalance in terms of coverage of all 20 principles and in terms of the tools presented. From the outset, the existence of directives in some dimensions and recommendations in others can lead to imbalances and a *negative hierarchy between rights and principles*. There is also a lack of a European 2030 Strategy linked with the European Ecological Package and the EPSR Action Plan and even with the SDGs.

Graciela ended with some key messages regarding national goals that are expected to be defined by each member state. On the one hand, it is important that all MS set goals and that they are ambitious and that they can match the European goals; on the other hand, an adequate monitoring of the European semester is crucial, supported by the revised panel/scoreboard of social indicators which, in fact, needs to integrate more indicators capable of monitoring the 20 principles. It is also essential that the EU reinforces its role in protecting the weakest, that recovery and resilience plans are clearly social and managed in a transparent and accountable manner; and that civil society can contribute with its knowledge in defining policies, legislation, implementing policies and monitoring processes.

*Five final lessons regarding the multidimensionality of poverty: poverty is a social and health determining factor; poverty cannot be the target of simplistic measures; requires a strategic approach; it requires political commitment and commands the increase of intentional actions in times of crisis. The EAPN therefore calls for the Commission to include an ambitious and multidimensional European strategy to combat poverty supported by key legislation that links its implementation across the EU.*

**Vladimir Špidla**

**Former European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and Advisor to EAPN Czech Republic**

The European Union has made great improvements since its foundation: achieving peace on the European continent and that political, economic, cultural, and religious peace has lasted for 70 years.

Not least: with the COVID-19 pandemic, we realize that social policies are the most important policy grounds. Here, too, we have seen some progress in recent decades, but in the context of European integration, progress in this field has been one of the slowest - while one of the greatest benefits of the EU has been to ensure economic, social, and religious development and peace in Europe.

Despite the differences in each country, progress has been made with the creation of a common framework for EU social policy. There is a European Social Model (MSE) that links social to

economic progress, characterized by universal social protection systems, health and pension plans accessible to all. But we are still far from that ideal situation. The poverty rate and the number of homeless people in the EU are still very high and these problems are now going to widen. In addition, many regions are affected by the economic downturn. The economic system as we know it has had negative impacts on the environment, as it needs perpetual growth ... and this cannot be continued,

Europe's social project is based on continuous growth and we must consider that we have time counted and that we must be able in the next 30 years to change to a society based on a different type of growth. A challenge that we face is how to organize an economic transition in a context of great social needs, from a society with a high consumption of resources, to a society with less or zero growth. Another, in parallel, is how to use artificial intelligence in a way that helps to humanize this transformation towards greener and digital economies and societies and that does not harm the European social model that we must stand for. The challenges that come with artificial intelligence can be compared to those we knew in the last industrial revolution.

Europe needs to make the social and digital transition happen in a decent and social way. This implies strong cooperation, a condition that is, however, impossible to achieve in the context of a socially fragmented society. Therefore, we urgently need to work to reduce inequality and income disparities. The political and legislative framework must avoid further dividing our societies.

It is our collective duty to continue to develop the European Social Model, also based on the EPSR. In the next phase, EPSR should be made mandatory and enforceable. The future of the EU also depends on the realization and guarantee of social rights. EU Member States must cooperate to achieve social rights. In the field of social and employment policies, we need to obtain more binding obligations and instruments at EU level.

Vladimir Spidla ended that we are still in an intense, and even conflicting, dialogue that will reach binding limits within the EPSR.

### **Jeanne Dietrich**

#### **Conseillère Technique Hébergement Logement UNIOPSS and EAPN France**

Jeanne Dietrich began by pointing out that EAPN France contributed to the Commission's consultation on the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. EAPN France put a lot of hope in the Plan due to its importance in improving people's lives, that is, the living and working conditions of people in France.

France will take on the Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2022 and EAPN expects the French Government to make every effort to be more ambitious in the national context, including with a view to the poverty reduction target of at least 15 million in the EU. For EAPN, the Action Plan should be improved at 4 levels: access to quality and sustainable nutrition; Minimum income; inclusion of adolescents and energy efficiency of buildings.

Access to food should be supported by the EPSR principle 20 on access to essential services. The Action Plan foresees an EU report on essential services for 2022 and a concrete and specific improvement could be to move towards a right to sustainable food. This right becomes more

urgent, as we have seen from the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cooperation at local level needs to be improved.

The precariousness of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 has increased. Failure to benefit from the French minimum income benefit “RSA” (Revenu de Solidarité Active) pushes these groups into a situation of poverty and social exclusion. At EU level, the use of the enhanced Youth Guarantee can help. The French Government must also implement a minimum income benefit for those in this age group and additional measures that guarantee support for their inclusion in the labour market to find employment, but, above all, to get good quality jobs.

Looking at the EC Directive on Decent / Adequate Minimum Wages. All EU Member States must have an adequate minimum wage. This would make it possible to have important “side effects”, from the outset, it would help to combat cross-border wage and social dumping for workers from countries with lower wage levels or, it would prevent situations in which migrant workers in France are pushed into situations due to their status of precarious employment, and to accept wages lower than the legal minimum wage. For EAPN France, it is also important to see an upward adaptation of minimum wage levels across Europe to make them *poverty-proof*.

Many people who live in poverty have high heating costs, live in poorly insulated houses, where people are cold and the bills to pay for heating are very high. EAPN France notes that, in the second quarter of 2021, an initiative in favour of affordable housing is planned as part of the European action plan. Initiative that integrates pilot projects in 100 renewal districts. In France, many investments are planned to carry out works to eliminate heat losses. However, the remaining costs, which people will have to pay after the payment of state aid, are still so high that they can be an obstacle to renovation works for lower-income families. To reconcile social and environmental concerns, EAPN France hopes that France will be able to count on the investments envisaged under the European Green Agreement, and under this initiative in favour of affordable housing and renewal at European level, to reduce this remaining cost for low-income people.

**Valentina Vehovar**

**Acting Director-General of Social Affairs Directorate of the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal**

The Government of Slovenia, together with the other countries in the Council of the European Union's Trio of Presidency, has committed itself to the fulfilment of the EPSR Action Plan. The participation of all in the labour market is central, as well as the reduction of inequalities and the fight against poverty.

Support must be given in the first instance to the most vulnerable groups and the action plan ensures this by promoting access to quality services for our citizens. The current crisis has engaged the action of Governments and in Slovenia we have already launched actions for the most vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, women, children, people with disabilities and the unemployed. It was possible to extend measures already underway and it was possible to guarantee new assistance measures for quarantined workers, extra subsidies for beneficiary families and vulnerable groups, more family allowances (additional support for large families), funds to guarantee support due to the pandemic, support students, among others. The aim is to

support all those who have seen their situation worsen with the pandemic. In addition, key measures in employment policy were approved in Slovenia with a view to reducing working time and guaranteeing workers an adequate level of social protection.

But it is necessary to move from measures to combat the crisis to more structural and long-lasting actions. In this sense, the Government supports the Council's recommendation on the minimum income level that was announced by the Commission within the Action Plan and that will allow to support what is done at national level. They also support the Commission's emphasis on the role of an effective social support network, access to support services at national level to combat poverty. The child poverty proposal that will allow coordinating a response to combat child poverty in accessing relevant services is also supported by the Government, as are initiatives aimed at the homeless population.

One of the central aspects of the Action Plan is the setting targets to be achieved by 2030. Slovenia has always supported the definition of universal targets, which also allow the definition of quality targets at national level. They agree that the poverty reduction target is less ambitious than the previous one, but we must join efforts to continue in this direction. The trend in poverty reduction in Slovenia was moving well before the pandemic. The established goal had even been exceeded. The at-risk-of-poverty rate has always been below the average in the Union. Slovenia faces structural challenges that need to continue to be tackled. The material support mechanism must be complemented with quality professional assistance; they have worked, for example, heavily on activating benefit recipients.

During the Slovenian Presidency, they will continue to work with Portugal and Greece to fulfil the Action Plan through the organization of political debates. One of the priorities will be the labour market and sustainable work, which necessarily considers the development of the workers' own lifelong learning; combat poverty in the labour market; promote jobs in the social economy; support for all workers, including the most vulnerable. It is also necessary to guarantee children and young people a better future.

**KEYNOTE SPEECH: THE PILLAR, ITS INSTRUMENTS AND THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY**

**José António Vieira da Silva**

**Adviser of the Portuguese Presidency of the UE**

José Vieira da Silva started by emphasizing that the approval of the European Commission's Action Plan is an important step in the progress of the social dimension of European policies; it gives it political significance, in articulation with the rest of the Union's policy areas and allows the development by the Commission and the Member States of new instruments in favour of cohesion and the fight against poverty.

How can the pillar be understood as an instrument to fight poverty? The 3 chapters of the Pillar can be understood as instruments to fight poverty. The fight against poverty is multidisciplinary because poverty also has multidisciplinary roots.

A second aspect has to do with the fact that at the heart of the policy of strengthening cohesion and reducing poverty, it is essential that the issue of employment be raised. The employment rate evolves against the poverty rate, that is, with an increase in employment, poverty tends to decrease.

But the monetary poverty indicator is relative and does not reflect the levels of inequality that exist. In fact, it reflects little on the social reality of each country.

Another dimension is related to the different rates of poverty that exist in the several groups of society. Participation in the labour market is no guarantee of being out of poverty. The situation is more serious for the self-employed, that is, self-employed workers, false self-employed workers, etc. This is a dimension present in the Action Plan since there is an initiative on the workers of the digital platforms, but also on the segmentation of the labour market. Employment is very important, but what kind of employment? José Vieira da Silva considered that there is a risk that, in a post-covid moment, these precarious employment situations will be seen (camouflaged) as the future, as the solution. Individual companies, start-ups, *entrepreneurship, etc. they have a lot of positivity, but sometimes they serve to pervert the labour market.*

Employment is important, but it is not enough. *Policies on social minimums are of enormous importance and will continue to mark the difference between the European social model and other models of society.* Within the scope of the Action Plan, it is possible to highlight 3 dimensions: a Directive on minimum wage; a new recommendation on minimum income; the Childhood Guarantee.

In the case of the minimum wage (essential in the fight against poverty), *the coverage presents some gaps*, since the minimum wage does not cover all workers, such as platform workers, independent (self-employed) workers.

In the case of minimum income, we have a new recommendation. The first is the 1992 recommendation (approved by the 1st Portuguese Presidency of the European Union). *It has not yet been possible to move from recommendations to a greater ambition for a binding legislative initiative. There is also a lack of political consensus in the European Union to transform this ambition into an obligation of member states (moving from soft law to hard law).* In this context, *it is necessary to deepen the instruments that exist considering the significant difference*

*that is in their recipients. To think about whether, for example, it will not be necessary to reflect on the specific instruments for recipients who are already definitely out of the labour market and, therefore, their minimum income should allow them to be out of poverty. And other segments that belong to the active population where this policy instrument should contribute to reducing the intensity of poverty, but also to promoting the right to work (accumulating income that allows them to escape from a kind of poverty trap in which the person is forced to choose social protection or employment). We need models that allow for more time and smoother processes in which people can combine MI support with the entry into the job market. A social model centred on cohesion must eliminate the choice, which is a tragic choice.*

Regarding the Child Guarantee, there is still some lack of knowledge about how it will develop. Child poverty is complex. Children are poor because they live in poor families. Keeping or taking children out of poverty means acting on family policies. It implies acting, as it is in the Plan, to guarantee children's access to education, health, etc.

José Vieira da Silva finished with some final considerations: the Pillar and the Action Plan presents global tools to combat poverty; employment is at the "heart" of social policies; cohesion is much more than poverty rates; why are there poor workers?; minimum social policies are a European imperative, and we need better indicators for better policies and the social dimension must be at the centre of all policies. *The fight against poverty must be at the heart of European policies.*

#### **ROUND TABLE: ADEQUATE MINIMUM INCOME AND THE RELEVANCE OF A EUROPEAN (FRAMEWORK) DIRECTIVE**

**Chair: Sandra Araújo, EAPN Portugal**

**Mathias Maucher**

**Policy Officer da EAPN Europa**

Mathias started by highlighting some of the milestones related to minimum income. From the outset, the Conclusions of the German Presidency Council which announced minimum income as one of the key priorities. Some Member States supported a binding legal instrument, but others did not want to support the definition of that instrument; and yet another group of member states questioned the competence and benefits of European action at this level. EAPN has done preparatory lobbying and advocacy work in parallel with the Council's conclusions to defend the centrality of minimum income and the importance of a European Directive.

The Council's conclusions have a number of positive aspects of which Mathias Maucher highlighted, from the outset the fact that they underlined the need for investment in RM as part of social protection; key design parameters "access", adequacy" & enabling character" were mentioned; the strong focus on children, single-parent families and take-up rates; the fact that they call for the involvement of civil society and people in poverty; the role of European monitoring and benchmarking frameworks / mutual learning and the fact that a European monitoring report has already been announced. The conclusions called, however, for a recommendation and not for a Directive, but it is permeable to make more ambitious decisions

if there is political will to do so. The next steps are the existence of a European minimum income network, the European report in 2022 and a new recommendation also in 2022.

Regarding minimum income within the EPSR Action Plan, a new council recommendation for 2022 was announced and it is necessary to understand what progress will be made in relation to the recommendation of 92. To define the current policy at EU level and the monitoring structure the sharing of good practices and mutual learning and a European report analysing the progress made by MS in terms of minimum income development were proposed. Mathias also drew attention to the goal of reducing poverty by 15 million by 2030 and left the question of whether there will be national goals, more ambitious goals to be announced at the Social Summit in May and how the European Social Fund and the Recovery and Resilience Fund will be used.

However, there are other fields of European policy that can establish advances in minimum income. Mathias highlighted the Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed (November 2019) which, while not highlighting minimum income, is oriented towards the most fragile employment situations with a more preventive action of falling into a situation of poverty, the proposed Directive on adequate minimum wages.

Mathias Maucher concluded his presentation by highlighting the main concerns / demands of the EAPN for the existence of a binding instrument at European level in terms of minimum income, including a Directive. Content is essential, even if it is a recommendation, and that is why it is important that there are common principles and definitions of common principles and definitions of adequacy, of accessibility/eligibility; it is important that the risk of poverty threshold, combined with national reference budgets, be considered as a benchmark for adequacy; advocate a rights-based approach and not based on (punitive) conditionality that forces people to accept jobs with precarious employment and working conditions. It is also essential to have European monitoring and a mutual learning structure, based on the European Semester; and there must be a non-regression clause, because whoever has quality systems must maintain them; support from European funds is important to carry out major reforms to systems that are inadequate and have little coverage; and finally, the involvement of civil society entities and people in situations of poverty is central.

### **Andreas Aust**

#### **Referent für Sozialpolitik, Paritätische Forschungsstelle, Der Paritätische and EAPN Germany**

Andreas started his presentation by talking about the situation in Germany, which has several specific schemes: for employable people, for the elderly and disabled and for refugees. It is a basic social right; it is not a matter of charity. They cover about 9% of the population in Germany. Minimum income schemes include regular subsidies (housing, heating, free school lunch, and are mainly financed by the federal state).

In 2005, the current system aimed at employable people was introduced. It has been controversial because it is regarded as regression / retrenchment of social rights towards workfare rather than welfare. There was a reduction in social security for the unemployed, which led to an increase in poverty; and the fact that people are forced to accept any job and

that is why there is a “reinforcement” of the sector of low wages and situations of working poor; and the tightening of the eligibility criteria, which leads to situations of exclusion from social protection. The most conflicting aspects focus on the level of benefits, sanctions (is it right to cut benefits that aim to promote a more dignified life?!) and discrimination against migrants. There are two opposing perspectives: those that defend the human rights perspective, which state that benefits must prevent poverty and the other liberal perspective on the labour market, which says that high benefits cause disincentives for work.

In Germany, to be on minimum income is equal to live in poverty (for example, data from 2018 indicate that for a person the minimum income level was € 770 and the poverty threshold of € 1035. There is a gap of around 265€ Andreas stressed the importance of the adequacy that needs to be worked on if we want to effectively fight poverty.

*Eradicating poverty is it a political choice? The answer is clearly: yes. Minimum income schemes are a potentially effective way to combat and prevent poverty. Looking at what is happening at European level, it appears that there are different schemes and that these have a different role depending on the inclusiveness of the labour markets and the quality of the Welfare States. We also find that the schemes have a limited effect on preventing poverty and this is because coverage is limited, and benefits are insufficient.*

Andreas Aust highlighted the work of the German Network under the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union. With regard to the European Policy Position Paper, EAPN Germany warned that the increase in poverty and inequality requires European social responses; the European green new deal has to be expanded into a social green deal (there is no sustainability without social progress); and called for the follow-up to Europe 2020 with ambitious social targets to be set; the definition of Directives on the minimum wage and minimum income; a European Child Guarantee and the existence of a minimum share of the Structural Funds for social inclusion. Adjusting the minimum income is a priority.

In the conclusions Andreas stressed that there must be common principles at European level in these matters; the action plan is central, but soft law is not enough and “mandatory standards” on minimum income schemes are needed; the definition of adequacy is central and the risk of poverty threshold is an important reference element; coverage must be universal; it must be a *social right (the only condition has to be need)*; monitoring and benchmarking framework is important and *has to be an element of major change in European policy from austerity to social progress.*

**Cidália Barriga**

**Representative of the National Citizens Council of EAPN Portugal**

Cidália began by emphasizing that *social protection is essential in Portugal*, for those who live *in a survival mode*, either because they are unemployed, or because they are precarious / working poor, and because wages are so low that they are insufficient to meet the needs of the household. Those who live on this type of wages without any other kind of income are inevitably at high risk of poverty. In these cases, if a member of the household becomes unemployed or sick, everything turns upside down and it is necessary to ask for social support.

Cidália highlighted her personal experience, that is, of a house that is above the poverty line, but where, for example, food is a basic unmet need.

Social protection is an increasingly important part of the citizens' lives. People are more vulnerable, and no one stops being poor for receiving the RSI and, therefore, this income should be adjusted to the citizens basic needs. The objective of the RSI was and is to reduce the intensity of poverty, but for it to work as a true measure to combat poverty, we must be aware of its effectiveness (result) and its efficiency (waste / performance mode).

Cidália urged to the need to fight for adequate social protection systems accessible to all citizens. And one of the ways this can happen is to create and implement a European Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Poverty is a European and global problem. That is why the Sustainable Development Goals, and the European Pillar of Social Rights are so important in the fight against this scourge. It is now necessary to take the next step and lay the foundations for a Strategy for its Eradication.

*Now is the time to bring together the wisdom and intelligence of all of us to show that this is a necessary measure for the empowerment of society and for its greater participation. Income, if it is adequate, accessible, and empowering, combats poverty and can provide access to a decent life.*

### **Linnéa Partanen**

#### **Finnish PeP Representative – EAPN Finland**

Linnéa started by sharing her personal experience, highlighting the fact that she *was 31 years old, and she was poor during her entire life*. In Finland house rents and daily expenses are very high. There are more and more people depending on the minimum income *and our family received the income when I was pregnant*. Throughout her life and due to different situations, she needed to benefit from the minimum income. It is practically impossible not to depend on the RM if the person lives alone and must rent a house.

The minimum income is supposed to be temporary, but it extends over time. There are many uncertainties and errors regarding this social benefit. And it is a benefit that does not cover basic expenses. To obtain this support, we need to fulfil certain requirements (there are conditions for acceptability, the application process is complex). There are many people who are unable to apply for benefits due to the complexity of the process and, for this reason, poor people have no choice but to wait outside *to get food in the bread lines*. Linnéa highlighted the fact that she had already benefited from the unemployment benefit and that it barely covered food expenses. She also pointed out when she had to retire due to illness and went to the pension, the minimum income, and even all the benefits together were few to help her living.

The minimum income helps to survive until the end of each month and despite being given to those in need, the system is complex and there is no guarantee that support will be granted.

In recent years there have been cuts in different social benefits, even those that are already so low if we refer to the standards of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Linnéa highlighted her difficulties at various times in obtaining money to pay for food and medication due to insufficient income.

In Finland, many people *have mental health problems, but support for mental health is very time consuming, you must wait many years*. Support services are not accessible to everyone. She highlighted the situation of young people, who with mental health problems are unable to study and work, fall into poverty and problems end up being more difficult to solve.

Ensuring better health care and income support is essential.

Linnéa highlighted the fact that the country has the label of being a rich and the happiest country in the world, which is “contradictory” regarding people like Linnéa who have struggled all their lives in poverty.

## **CLOSING:**

**Ana Mendes Godinho**

**Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Protection**

Europe is facing one of its main challenges since the Second World War. The main answer is health, but also to safeguard the social protection of people and families.

The most vulnerable people are particularly affected by the pandemic. The pandemic also exposed vulnerabilities that require both emergency and structural responses. The Minister also highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the increase of poverty and inequalities and how it needs integrated and global responses and not just palliative measures. *Europe needs a global, united, and supportive response in different dimensions. The Social Agenda must be placed at the top of the agenda, at the centre of the European recovery and at the base of the double digital and environmental transition.* The Portuguese Presidency has this obligation to reaffirm the importance of the social agenda and to place it at the top of the recovery priorities.

There is a need for a coordinated response in the various dimensions: health, economic and social sphere, which must also remain for the future. The EPSR Action Plan must be integrated into recovery programs at European and national level, as well as financial mechanisms and instruments for structural investment. One of the aspects highlighted by the Minister, and which is part of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan, is based on the importance of having more effective and more adaptable and customized *social protection tailored to the needs of each person and not broadband and, often, without the ability to respond individually to each citizen. Only in this way we can structurally combat poverty and promote real conditions of equality and access to opportunities.*

*The EPSR Plan comes at a key moment as, on the one hand, it ensures that the European Union reinforces its values linked to the European social model, strengthening social cohesion, reducing inequalities and poverty, and promoting employment and social inclusion.* The Minister stressed that the Presidency is fully committed to investing in the social dimension of Europe and implementing the Action Plan, as key instruments to overcome the economic and social crisis and as a structural investment for the future. *Our time is a time for action and our Presidency goes from strategy to action, imposes a time to act which sustains the need for a social Europe to be a reality... in which citizens trust the European project and our common collective future.*

*The European Pillar of Social Rights has been the political framework of reference that allows addressing the social dimension and boosting its implementation through the action plan, is to overcome and to respond to this economic and social crisis through investment in the social dimension is a priority of the Portuguese Presidency.*

*The Action Plan is ambitious, solid, and balanced. It is a decisive step for us to move from principles to action together. Investing in people, especially in the most vulnerable and giving people a voice to defend their rights.* The Minister highlighted the fact that the Presidency welcomed the ambitious goals proposed by the Action Plan. She also highlighted that it is the responsibility of all to implement European policies that enhance the well-being of citizens, that fight poverty and that make solidarity truly effective. *This requires strong social safety nets, inclusive public services, strong and effective social dialogue, and courageous public investment. Only with ambition will we be able to respond to the problems caused by the pandemic.*



## KEY MESSAGES OF THE CONFERENCE

### At European level

- Include an ambitious and multidimensional European strategy to combat poverty supported by key legislation that links its implementation across the EU.
- Ensure a political commitment by all member states to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Goals set for employment, skills, and the fight against poverty.
- Ensuring an effective balance between the social, digital and climate dimension to promote greater social justice and the inclusion of the most vulnerable people.
- Promote innovative approaches in the field of social protection to respond to the impacts of the crisis. Guarantee a commitment at European level on the value of adequate minimum income schemes as a way of strengthening social protection and combating the impacts of the crisis on the reduction of people's incomes.
- Ensuring a better balance between rights and principles through the gradual definition of more binding instruments at the level of social policies.
- Promote a strong European Semester that can monitor the fulfilment of European and national goals, as well as the social progress of Member States and ensure mutual learning. Monitoring should involve different stakeholders, with an emphasis on civil society entities and people experiencing of poverty.
- Ensure coordination between all investment funds to guarantee effective and efficient compliance with the Action Plan and the protection of the most vulnerable, avoiding new austerity policies and guaranteeing the definition of social inclusion policies.
- Ensure the definition and implementation of coordination and participation mechanisms for all stakeholders in the implementation of the Action Plan.

### At National level

- Definition of ambitious national targets to enable the European targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan to be met. The national goal of combating poverty must be an example at European level and be able to ensure a convergence of the other member states towards the fulfilment of European goals.
- Ensure that the various principles of the Pillar function as instruments to fight poverty as a multidimensional issue that requires a multidisciplinary response.
- The National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion must be integrated and act on the causes of poverty. *The combat of poverty as a national goal must be at the heart of the Strategy.*
- Promote an effective debate around the policies of social minimums (minimum wage and social benefits) with a view to their re-design in terms of coverage, accessibility, adequacy, and promotion of participation.

- Ensure a Governance strategy that allows the participation of all actors, namely citizens who live in greater vulnerability, in the construction of a more resilient society and economy.

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Plano de Ação  
para a Implementação do

## PILAR EUROPEU DOS DIREITOS SOCIAIS

CONFERÊNCIA

22 MARÇO 2021 09:00

### PROGRAMA

#### SESSÃO DE ABERTURA

Mariana Vieira da Silva  
Ministra do Trabalho e da Presidência

Pe. Jardim Moreira  
Presidente da EAPN Portugal

#### COMUNICAÇÃO DE ABERTURA

O Pilar, os seus instrumentos e  
o combate à pobreza

José António Vieira da Silva  
Conselheiro da Presidência Portuguesa

#### ENCERRAMENTO DA CONFERÊNCIA

Ana Mendes Godinho  
Ministra do Trabalho, Solidariedade  
e Segurança Social

#### ENCERRAMENTO DA 1ª PARTE

09:00

09:30

12:30

14:00

14:20

16:00

#### MESA REDONDA

O Plano de Ação para a implementação  
do Pilar Europeu dos Direitos Sociais:  
que significado concreto na vida dos  
cidadãos?

Katarina Ivanković-Knežević  
Diretora dos Assuntos Sociais, DG EMPL, Comissão Europeia

Edmundo Martinho  
Coordenador da Estratégia Nacional de Luta Contra a Pobreza

Graciela Malgesini  
Consultora da UE e Membro do Grupo EUSG da EAPN, EAPN Espanha

Vladimír Špidla  
Ex-Comissário Europeu para o Emprego, Assuntos Sociais e Igualdade  
de Oportunidades, Consultor da EAPN, República Checa

Jeanne Dietrich  
Consultora da Hébergement Logement UNIPSS, EAPN França

Valentina Vehovar  
Diretora-Geral da Direção de Assuntos Sociais do Ministério do Trabalho,  
Família, Assuntos Sociais e Igualdade da Eslovénia

#### DEBATE

MODERAÇÃO  
Sandra Monteiro  
Le Monde Diplomatique

#### MESA REDONDA

Rendimento Mínimo Adequado e a  
importância de uma Diretiva Europeia

Mathias Meucher  
Policy Officer, EAPN Europa

Andreas Aust  
Consultor de Política Social, Politische Forschungsstelle, Der  
Paritätische, EAPN Alemanha

Cidália Barriga  
Representante do Conselho Nacional de Cidadãos da EAPN Portugal

Linnéa Partanen  
Representante das Pessoas em Situação de Pobreza, EAPN Finlândia

#### DEBATE

MODERAÇÃO  
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EAPN Portugal

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