

**Side Event**

**May 26, 2023**

# Edgar Campos, Conselho Local de Cidadãos de Viseu / EAPN Portugal

Good morning to all the participants!

I welcome all of you in this Porto Social Forum. Thank you for the courage and willingness to collaborate in the construction of a growing society in sharing, in knowledge exchange, in intervention, favouring the fulfilment of the social rights for each person, for each family, for each community.

I am here today, representing EAPN Portugal, to give voice to so many people who live or have experienced poverty and social exclusion.

These people, who in many cases are survivors, have worked, year after year, with honesty, commitment, gratitude to embrace challenges related to serious problems such as: access to essential services and goods, the increase in the cost of living, the recognition of decent opportunities for work and wages, among many other issues.

These people that I am representing are not only survivors of an extremely difficult political and social reality, but they are, above all, the centre and the great motivation of everything that is going to be discussed today in this Forum.

Let us keep in mind that no one is just a number. What would politics and institutions be without people?

The actions that will emerge from these two days should lead us to hope and to the realisation of a serious work of transparency, of true appreciation of people and their lives, giving visibility to those who, normally, do not have it.

Are we prepared and available for this?

The People’s Summit that we held in March was intended to be a moment of discussion and assessment of the action plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The People’s Summit, organized by the European Anti Poverty Network Portugal (EAPN Portugal) and the European Anti Poverty Network Europe (EAPN), in march 2023, brought together people experiencing poverty, associate members, policy makers and grassroots social organizaaotions to evaluate the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan through several workshops and plenary sessions. A living example of what active participation is, as the Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, Ana Mendes Godinho said in the opening session of the People’s Summit. It was an opportunity for EAPN to bring a new methodology to a Political Conference: a more inclusive approach, a bottom-up perspective and to advocate for true deliberative democracy in the process of monitoring and evaluating the EPSR Action Plan.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), despite being a guiding document, it is not a binding document! It came at a time when social issues were losing force within the European Union.

From 2017, when it was proclaimed, to 2021 when the action plan was presented, the European and national context at social, economic and political level has changed considerably.

The focus of the European Pillar of Social Rights must be on social change and on improving the living conditions of the people but, at the moment, we wonder if the current action plan can give an effective response to the difficulties that people are facing.

The work that we have done in our People's Summit has led us to realise that there are key areas that can no longer be forgotten: tackling the structural causes of poverty with an European anti-poverty strategy, having a holistic and integral vision/approach; seek greater fiscal justice, promote access to adequate income measures, promote digital literacy, create binding documents for the Member States and not just recommendations; involve people living in poverty and social exclusion in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies.

We continue to say that we have very good tools and goals, but in many situations we don´t put them into action and they remain forgotten in policymakers’ drawers! The policies and tools we create should be known and discussed by everyone. They must be dynamic, flexible, operational, adaptable to all contexts and to all people, in a sustainable way.

It was clear to the participants in the People’s Summit that the impact of the Pillar has been limited and that its Action Plan remains an insufficient roadmap for poverty eradication. Despite outlining important principles and rights, the implementation of social rights and the monitoring of the impact of the Action Plan have been insufficient.

The European Pillar of Social Rights needs to be able to effectively respond to the challenges of the moment and effectively defend people's social rights and their access to them.

In addition, the Social Scoreboard monitoring the implementation of the Pillar and its Action Plan does not reflect the multiple dimensions of poverty and social exclusion in Europe, especially in the current context.

For me it would be very good if these two days were summed up in two words. "participation" and "responsibility". Without the active and responsible participation of all people – especially those who live or have experienced situations of poverty and social exclusion - political, technical and institutional actors, it is not possible to get to the bottom of the situations in an adjusted way.

Thank you.

# Sheila Habib, EAPN Europa

Thank you Edgar.

EAPN is very happy to be back in Porto, two months since our People’s Summit and two years after the Porto Social Commitment and the Porto Declaration with the aim of bringing the principles of the Pillar of Social Rights to full realisation.

However, we caution that the success of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan cannot be measured by the number of initiatives/strategies/recommendations adopted, but rather by the actual impact on the ground and on the wellbeing of people living in poverty and social exclusion. This requires a **fully integrated anti-poverty strategy,** including an impact assessment of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. We regret to see that there is no clear roadmap on how to successfully achieve by 2030 the target of reducing at least 15 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Poverty erodes economic and social rights and therefore experiencing poverty is a violation of fundamental rights to live in dignity and participate in society. The EU’s first priority must be to ensure a right to a dignified life for all with good living standards: the principle of leave no one behind applied to the core.

When analysing the EU-27 Contribution to the EPSR Poverty Reduction Target, we regret to notice that not only the overall target falls lower that the UN Sustainable Development Goal 1 (end poverty in all its forms everywhere), but also that countries with the lowest GDP per capita are aiming to contribute the most to the poverty reduction target. There was a strong potential to have a more equitable and fair distribution of the EU poverty reduction target, with solidarity measures among Member States. Yet this is not reflected in the current national targets. We see it as a direct consequence of the lack of a comprehensive EU consensus and strategy when it comes to social rights.

For that reason, the EU must go beyond emergency measures, mitigating the effect of the single market, but also make structural investments for social protection and social rights.

However, to tackle the structural causes of poverty both in macroeconomic and microeconomic policies and overcome the shortcomings and gaps of the current EPSR Action Plan mentioned by Edgar, People experiencing Poverty demand a comprehensive person-centred rights-based integrated EU anti-poverty strategy. The goal should be poverty eradication and not alleviation. To guarantee a fair and well-functioning labour markets and social protection systems, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan must address, in an integrated manner, the structural and systemic deficiencies of our welfare systems and the multidimensionality of poverty, by effectively guaranteeing the right and access to adequate income (minimum income and minimum wages), social protection and accessible affordable and quality essential services.

It goes without saying that to get to a social Europe, free from poverty, the EU must dedicate ambitious resources and targets. **Fiscal justice is an essential tool for wealth redistribution, and for funding sustainable welfare states**. Convergence in the EPSR headline targets must be achieved through different Strategies linked to financial instruments, such as structural funds or windfall taxes. We would like to remind that fighting poverty includes understanding how it affects different people. Establishing mechanisms to collect **disaggregated data** by age, sex, disability, religion and belief, gender, sexual orientation, race, migration status, socio-economic status, citizenship and nationality based on self-identification and anonymity is crucial to account for the multiple systemic barriers faced by vulnerable groups and provide an intersectional approach to policy making.

The **European Semester** process, being the mandatory fiscal exercise that aims to monitor the EPSR action plan will need to be profoundly reshaped to improve its social component. For instance, the Social Scoreboard, should include quantitative and qualitative indicators to capture wellbeing including working conditions, take up of rights and participation. It is time to put an end to the infinite pursuit of cost effectiveness over accessibility and competitiveness over quality.

Moreover, an anti-poverty strategy will need to tackle the **trade-off between universal and targeted policies**.

It is clear from people experiencing poverty, policy experts and other social actors at the People’s Summit, that we held in March 2023, that **targeted measures and resources are essential: lifting people out of poverty must be the focus**. Targeted measures will have a significant higher impact if properly implemented.

As Lesley O'Reilly, from EAPN Ireland, said, *policymakers blame poverty on the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, but this is not real: poverty is generational and greed is the main factor*. Therefore, we must reflect on the context in which the EPSR Action Plan was created and the need to update the **EU's approach in the midst of crises.** Indeed, since 2021 Europe has been facing multiple crises and challenges: the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the rising cost of living, climate and digital transitions and the effects of long-term austerity measures.

Faced with this, **the EPSR Action Plan has become obsolete and unable to respond to the current reality**. Moreover, the EPSR will fail to alleviate poverty without structurally addressing the root causes of poverty, from which the crisis and greed have strived: liberalisation, growth and profit driven model over people and the planet.

As said by Cidália Barriga, from the Portuguese Évora Local Council of Citizens: *The European Commission needs to make the European Pillar of Social Rights not a recommendation, but a binding document.* The reliance on soft law and therefore lack of binding legislation, such as a **Framework Directive on Minimum Income or an EU Directive on the Protection of Universal Public Services**, leads to an absence of minimum standards in terms of adequacy, accessibility, eligibility, and enabling characteristics of minimum income (due to bureaucracy, stigma, digitization of procedures, lack of information, strict eligibility criteria and punitive conditionalities). Weak minimum income schemes lead to barriers in accessing basic essential goods and services.

After decades of austerity, liberalization and privatization, essential services still do not have the proper resources, human or financial, and therefore are not adequate, accessible, affordable or transparent to people. To EAPN, an EU directive to protect universal public services, as public goods, is imperative to avoid the increasingly marketized, profit-driven model. All public services, healthcare, education but also water, sanitation, food, housing, energy, transport, digital and financial services as well as social services and justice systems, provide an essential public infrastructure that represent essential common public goods to the EU, a flagstone of the European Social Model.

Last but not least, as mentioned by Edgar, in order to effectively combat poverty, **governance mechanisms** must include **meaningful, safe participation of people experiencing poverty, in all their diversity.** Any process towards eradicating poverty that does not centre on people experiencing poverty remains deficient and risks being unsuccessful. We urgently need an approach focusing on **people's participation in their own inclusion processes**, where people move from a passive role to an active role, from policy design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

And that’s it on my end, I now pass the word to my colleague Paula Cruz. Thank you.

# Paula Cruz, EAPN Portugal

Thank you Sheila and Thank you Edgar. A warm welcome to all the participants to my city.

**In implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, Member States have a central role**. Not only have national targets been set, but it is also expected that the recommendations coming from the EPSR Action Plan can be adopted at national level. This is a potential, but has also some risks. The Action Plan is not a binding document, as we have already mentioned today. Several of the participants in the People's Summit have shown that they are exhausted and feel under pressure from the multiple relentless crises we are facing . The answers found by EU/European policymakers are not adequate and are not enough to generate an effective change in people's lives. That is why one of the major recommendations to Member States that came out of our People’s Summit is that ***it is time to implement long-term structural changes and to put people at the centre of policies***. Emergency measures are not enough. We cannot effectively fight poverty and get social change with consecutive emergency measures.

This is why the definition of **national Anti-Poverty strategies** are also extremely relevant. We have the example of Portugal which, for the first time, has a National Strategy and is preparing an action plan. This is an important step forward. But it is not the whole solution, as it is not enough to have the Strategy and the Plan. There is a need to make it operational and mobilize all the necessary actors (from the most macro level of decision makers to the most micro level, of people, namely the most vulnerable). I repeat Edgar's words: we need to get to the bottom of the situations in an adjusted manner and people's participation is central. Therefore, participation spaces that promote a broad reflection on the constraints and the results obtained by the strategy should be privileged.

Also central to make any action plan operational is the financial resources. We cannot implement an action plan if there is no adequate financial investment for the measures. As EAPN Portugal, we are looking forward to the Portuguese action plan and to a clear commitment to making it operational.

Another dimension highlighted at People’s Summit was the need for investment in **adequate income measures**, such as minimum income and minimum wages. If we want to ensure real inclusion of people and break vicious cycles of poverty, we need to ensure, on the one hand, **adequate social protection for all**, throughout the life cycle that allows people, both those who can work and those who cannot, to live in dignity. on the other hand, Member States must guarantee **access to a labour market with decent wages and adequate working conditions**, as mentioned by Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.

The situation of the **working poor** (a national but also European reality) is the visible face that if work is not decent it traps people in poverty. It is clear that we need an effective active inclusion approach. This is more than promoting measures aimed at getting people into any job and as the "only way out of poverty". This is about ensuring access to adequate income, access to an inclusive labour market and access to affordable and quality services.

***On access to services,*** People's Summit participants highlighted the excessive bureaucracy that prevents access to rights. *The lack of freedom and the subordination that is imposed on those who seek help. Sometimes it seems to me that the purpose of services is to get people to give up and be “one less”* as one participant from Spain told us.

We cannot also forget the impact of the digital transition. Directly related to services, digitalisation facilitates but also excludes, especially the most vulnerable, those who do not have the skills, the resources and/or internet connection to "navigate" the digital web. We wonder to what extent **access to services** is becoming a luxury, when they **should be seen as basic rights.** Access to affordable and quality essential services must be universal accessible, without exception, and complemented with targeted measures for vulnerable groups, particularly in the context of multiple crises and in relation to the link between healthy people and a healthy planet in the European Green Deal.

At the People's Summit, a call was made for the **humanisation of services** to enable people to be truly accompanied, without judgment. Humanisation is not adverse to digitalisation, but it requires that digitalisation finds the perfect balance so that it does not create more injustices and divisions that have the most vulnerable people as their main target. The promotion of digital services must be accompanied by physical solutions.

I will end by highlighting the importance of having a holistic view on social problems and on intervention with families. The fight against **child poverty** - which is also one of the most visible faces of poverty requires intervention in families, ensuring access to their basic, fundamental social rights and guaranteeing a prosperous future for children.

Dear Sirs and Madams, the message of the People's Summit can be summed up in a simple sentence said by the president of the Portuguese network, Jardim Moreira: *Fighting poverty is fighting for the integral development of every human being, based on a strong commitment for an effective participation of all!*

We need social and economic justice and an equitable redistribution of wealth. We urgently need a joint voice and action at European level based on a European Anti-Poverty strategy, supported by binding documents. We need to invest in meaningful participation.

Poverty is not an accident. It depends on political choices and we need, at this moment in time, to make different, better and more people-oriented choices.

Thank you.