



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

EU 2022 Poverty Watch: Unequal Times of Crises

2022

EAPN Report



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.



Contents

Abbreviations	6
Introduction	9
What is the Poverty Watch Report?	10
Poverty through EAPN's eyes	11
Unequal Times of Crises Call for Strong Welfare States	14
What is Missing for a Social Europe?	21
Achieving the EPSR Poverty Reduction Target	22
Adequacy of Social Protection Schemes	24
Inclusive Labour Market	28
Affordable and Quality Housing	32
A Socially Just Green Transition For All	36
Affordable and Accessible Healthcare	40
Affordable, Accessible and Quality Education	46
Addressing the Digital Divide	49
The Experience of Poverty for Vulnerable Groups	53
— Migrants	55
— Women	58
— Children	60
— Roma	61
— Youth	62
— Elderly	62
— Unemployed	63

Towards an Integrated and Ambitious EU Anti-Poverty Strategy	64
Promising Examples around Europe	65
Voices of People Experiencing Poverty: Expertise and Voices from the Ground	66
Recommendations for Making our Societies Poverty-Free and Resilient to Future Crises	70
Information & Contact	84
Acknowledgements	86



Abbreviations

AROP	At risk of poverty
AROPE	At risk of poverty or social exclusion
AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
COVID-19	Coronavirus pandemic
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czechia
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EAPN	European Anti-Poverty Network
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ENAR	European Network Against Racism
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
ES	Spain
EU	European Union
EU-27	European Union's 27 countries
FI	Finland
FR	France
FRA	Fundamental Rights Agency
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary

ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IE	Ireland
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
IT	Italy
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NEETs	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NL	Netherlands
NO	Norway
PICUM	Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UN	United Nations
VAT	Value Added Tax



Introduction

What is the Poverty Watch Report?

The EU Poverty Watch report is a bottom-up analysis of 24 National Poverty Watches¹ produced by our members that provides accurate data collection of the state of play of poverty in Europe. Every year, this report helps us put poverty as a multidimensional concept at the top of the EU agenda, highlighting the root causes of poverty and amplifying the voices of people experiencing poverty. It is an evidence-based report on the current trends and policies on poverty and social exclusion in Europe with concrete recommendations on EAPN's priority matters. This year, our EU Poverty Watch report focuses on the multiple relentless crises that have exacerbated poverty and inequalities: the soaring inflation and the rising cost of living, the ongoing war in Ukraine and the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These crises have exacerbated our society's pre-existing, structural and systemic deficiencies and call for strong structural responses.

¹ They can be found [here](#).

Poverty through EAPN's eyes

Being poor does not always mean sleeping in a cardboard box at the train station and spending one's days in the park: being poor means not being able to take part in everyday social life.

EAPN Austria

Poverty is characterised by a lack or deprivation of income, goods and/or services that are fundamental to a decent life. People experience poverty as many deprivations, not only as not enough money, but through experiences, opportunities, services and environments that many accept as normal or take for granted. **These deprivations may include unemployment, in-work poverty, lack of access to quality education, affordable health care, social integration, family support, accommodation and residence status.** Poverty can prevent full personal and family development and participation in social life and deprives society of people's full potential, therefore undermining social cohesion. **Poverty and social exclusion are a denial of fundamental human rights and thus a failure to respect and protect human dignity.** People in poverty suffer stigma, shame, discrimination, isolation and exclusion from social life, negative consequences of tightly constrained or short-term decisions, poorer mental and physical health and shorter life expectancy.² People can be pushed to the margins, experience alienation, and be stigmatised and discriminated against for

² EAPN. (2020, April 16). *What is poverty and how to combat it?* www.eapn.eu/explainer-on-the-multidimensionality-of-poverty-eapn-explainer/

being 'othered'. The concept of **otherness**, largely studied in sociology and social sciences, has been inspired by Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, in the decolonisation and fight against imperialism context.³

"Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (Us, the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (Them, Other) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination."⁴

Poverty arises from complex and multidimensional processes that cannot be dealt with in isolation or on the margins because it affects different people in different ways. For EAPN, **the concept of multidimensional poverty is essential in recognising the wider psychological, social and cultural as well as economic effects of poverty**. The multidimensional poverty concept addresses the experience and impact of poverty on people's path through life and generations.

Poor areas, often in disadvantaged urban quarters of large towns and cities or in more remote rural areas, also increase the risk of multidimensional poverty and exclusion. These are places and spaces that lack much of the usual infrastructure of transport and well-paid work, social services, good public schools, leisure, cultural and community spaces. They may have greater environmental hazards and pollution. Children living in such poor areas from an early age are especially disadvantaged by highly segregated institutions which reproduce social inequality and unequal opportuni-

³ Arias, R., & Bryla, M. (2018). *Orientation towards otherness in the social and literary spaces of today's Europe*. Palgrave Communications, 4(1). Retrieved December 9, 2022, from <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0070-3>; *Frantz Fanon and the Revolution Against Racism*. (2021, July 7). Jacobin. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from <https://jacobin.com/2021/09/frantz-fanon-revolution-racism-anti-colonialism-imperialism-algeria-caribbean-africa>

⁴ Staszak, J. F. (2020). *Other/Otherness*. International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography, 25–31. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-102295-5.10204-5>

ties.⁵ **They are also at more risk of intergenerational poverty as they and future generations are more likely to be trapped in poverty, in cycles of survival and struggles.**

EAPN is committed to challenging the current economic profit-oriented model of growth, with communities affected by all forms of exploitation. **EAPN seeks to find solutions that can eradicate the unequal concentration of wealth and distribution of resources, as we consider that poverty is primarily the consequence of the way society is organised and resources are allocated.**⁶ EAPN believes that an intersectional approach⁷ is key in the economic and social justice movement and therefore we mainstream gender equality, anti-racism and non-discrimination in all areas of our work. We work to challenge and change the unfair status quo, with and for people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

5 EAPN. (2020, April 16). *What is poverty and how to combat it?* www.eapn.eu/explainer-on-the-multidimensionality-of-poverty-eapn-explainer/

6 EAPN. (2016). *Poverty and Inequality in the EU*. www.eapn.eu/new-update-of-the-explainer-on-poverty-and-social-exclusion/

7 “Intersectionality looks at the ways in which various social categories such as gender, class, race, sexuality, disability, religion and other identity axes are interwoven on multiple and simultaneous levels. The discrimination resulting from these mutually reinforcing identities leads to systemic injustice and social inequality.” from European Network Against Racism. (2020, September 14). *Report: Intersectional discrimination in Europe*. www.enar-eu.org/intersectionalityreport/



Unequal Times of Crises Call for Strong Welfare States

Despite the strong will to forget the COVID-19 pandemic, the arrival of winter has reminded all of us that it is far from being over. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is still being felt, with the number of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion rising. The past two years have also led to a deterioration of people's mental health and a rise in mental health problems (FI, EL, CZ, SI, PT, SK). **These relentless times of crises have exacerbated the pre-existing, structural and systemic societal deficiencies in our society**, which has meant that poverty-related problems increased.

We are currently **living in an unbearable cost-of-living crisis**. The past months were marked by rising inflation throughout Europe: in most of the EU-27, it surpassed 8% (except for Malta, Spain and France).⁸ This means that the prices of basic goods such as food, electricity, mobility and housing have increased exponentially. **If before 2022, people experiencing poverty were already struggling to make ends meet, their struggle has only worsened.** As EAPN Netherlands highlighted, a pack of butter rose by more than 25% in price in just over four months, like many other everyday foods.

Poverty makes you silent in your neighbourhood and on the societal level as well.

— EAPN Finland

On top of that, European countries were starting to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic when Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The impact of the war in Europe has been significant: it further exacerbated inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, led to mass migration and, already high, energy prices spiked due to geopolitical tensions and supply cuts of Russian gas. The latter has increased the number of people living in ener-

⁸ *Inflation rate of the EU-27 in October 2022, by country.* (2022, December 7). Statista. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from www.statista.com/statistics/225698/monthly-inflation-rate-in-eu-countries/

gy poverty⁹ and is disproportionately impacting low-income households. **Often misinterpreted as a personal burden, energy poverty is instead the product of an exploitative profit-oriented energy system, which has failed to deliver for society and the planet.** Energy poverty derives from a combination of structural causes, such as income inequality, inadequate housing, unfair energy prices, and results in the inability to access essential energy services at an affordable price.

"Unprecedented price surges mean that for many people across the world, the food that they could afford yesterday is no longer attainable today."

— Achim Steiner, United Nations Development Programme Administrator ¹⁰

The increased cost of living is directly related to skyrocketing energy prices and has had a negative impact on low-income households due to their growing dependency on gas, and their inadequate access to **renewable, renovation and energy-efficiency programmes**. The poor welfare systems across the EU have done very little to ease the unbearable cost of living, and people's purchasing power is declining as a consequence. Although new emergency social benefit schemes or subsidies were created across Europe to ease the impact of these unequal times of crisis, they remained inadequate in the face of inflation thus failed to lift people out of poverty.

In the **European Parliament Spring 2022 Survey**, 96% of the Portuguese respondents stated that **difficulty to pay the bills was a reality most of the time**. In the overall report, a clear majority (87%) of respondents said their standard of living has already been reduced by the war in Ukraine (40%)

⁹ EAPN understands energy poverty as someone who is unable to keep his/her/their house adequately heated or cooled.

¹⁰ **Global cost-of-living crisis catalyzed by war in Ukraine sending tens of millions into poverty** (2022, July 7). United Nations Development Programme. www.undp.org/press-releases/global-cost-living-crisis-catalyzed-war-ukraine-sending-tens-millions-poverty-warns-un-development-programme

or will be reduced (47%) in the future. Most (61%) were not confident their life will continue unchanged.¹¹ Additionally, according to the second LGBTI survey conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), emphasised by [ILGA Europe](#), one third of all LGBTI respondents in 2019 indicated that their households had difficulty in making ends meet, translating into 52% for intersex respondents, and 46% for trans respondents.¹²

Therefore, although we might all be in the same storm, we are not in the same boat: as **the impact of these crises disproportionately affect people experiencing poverty**, with food and energy bills making up the majority of their expenses. In countries like Slovenia, this unbearable cost of living crisis has resulted in more undeclared work, leading to inadequate social protection and labour insecurity. In others, people are getting into debt as they are unable to pay their high bills (LV, EL, SI, FI). All in all, the soaring inflation has seen more people experiencing poverty relying on food aid (FI, EE, FR, BE, PL).¹³

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine showcased the unfair EU anti-migration policies and efforts, in particular **the double standards between Ukrainian and refugees of African descent**. As highlighted by our member, [ENAR](#), “while in October 2021, [Ministers of 12 Member States were calling for tougher border measures against migrants](#) to justify the systemic violation of human rights, those same calls were not repeated when welcoming Ukrainian refugees.”¹⁴ This has led to increasing exclusion and inequalities among racialised refugees, also reported by the UN Refugee Agency, with Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, stating on 21 March 2022: **“While I am humbled by the outpouring of support we witnessed by host countries and communities, we also bore witness to the ugly reality that some Black and Brown people fleeing Ukraine – and other wars and conflicts around the world – have not received the same treatment as Ukrainian ref-**

¹¹ European Parliament. (2022, June). *EP Spring 2022 Survey: Rallying around the European flag - Democracy as anchor point in times of crisis*. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2792>

¹² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2020, May 14). *EU LGBTI Survey II*. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2018/eu-lgbti-survey-ii>

¹³ For more information, read Global Network Against Food Crises. (n.d.). *Global Report on Food Crises*. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from www.fightfoodcrises.net/fileadmin/user_upload/fightfoodcrises/doc/resources/GRFC_2022_FINAL_REPORT.pdf

¹⁴ European Network Against Racism. (2022, March 30). *Racist double-standards persist at EU/Ukraine borders and beyond*. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from www.enar-eu.org/racism-borders-eu-ukraine/

ugees. They reported disturbing incidents of discrimination, violence, and racism. These acts of discrimination are unacceptable.”¹⁵

Our current Director, Juliana Wahlgren, at the time Acting Director at ENAR, highlighted how **“the decision to invoke the Temporary Protection Directive¹⁶ is historical and yet disappointing in that it still applies a racist double standard which prevents non-Ukrainians from having the same legal protection. Migrants from racialised backgrounds are often granted a 15-day visa which pales in comparison to the potential 3 years provided to Ukrainian migrants. Skin colour or passport types should not be a criteria which provides one group of people more protection over another.”¹⁷**

This showcases that **political will is a prerequisite to any social policy, including in times of crises**. As underlined by our members and the FRA, the Temporary Protection Directive activation has not been equal across Europe.¹⁸ In some European countries, refugees from Ukraine struggled to get access to subsistence payments, adhere to the labour market and/or find housing (IE, EE). This is further proof of how fragile and unprepared social protection systems in Europe are, due to decades of under-investment. The war in Ukraine is not the first war that has happened on Europe’s borders, and migration and asylum policies have been quite ineffective, hindering migrants’ social inclusion and integration due to “racial profiling, different reception measures, and mistreatment by State agents.”¹⁹

There is a clear need for quality and accessibility of essential services and social protection schemes for all vulnerable groups in Europe. Cutting or reducing access to services, common in austerity measures, reduces peo-

¹⁵ High Commissioner’s message on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. (2022, March 21). www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2022/3/62370dc44/high-commissioners-message-international-day-elimination-racial-discrimination.html

¹⁶ The Directive provides those fleeing Ukraine with residency rights, access to the labour market, housing, social welfare assistance, medical assistance, and education for children. For more information, please read Council of the EU. (2022). *EU temporary protection for displaced persons*. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/temporary-protection-displaced-persons/

¹⁷ European Network Against Racism. (2022, March 30). Racist double-standards persist at EU/Ukraine borders and beyond. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from www.enar-eu.org/racism-borders-eu-ukraine/

¹⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2022, October 31). *National legislation implementing the EU Temporary Protection Directive in selected EU Member States*. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/national-legislation-implementing-eu-temporary-protection-directive-selected-eu-0#publication-tab-0>

¹⁹ European Network Against Racism. (2022, March 30). Racist double-standards persist at EU/Ukraine borders and beyond. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from www.enar-eu.org/racism-borders-eu-ukraine/


ple's rights and their ability to lead a full life, to engage in their community and to access and stay in work.²⁰ For EAPN, social protection schemes are necessary pre-conditions to unlock access to essential services.²¹ **Universal, adequate, social protection across the life cycle is a crucial element of active inclusion strategies to achieve socioeconomic inclusion.** Stronger welfare states must also be financed through tax justice²² and fairer redistribution of wealth.²³ The current unequal times of crises have highlighted the need for social protection schemes, coupled with investment in social reforms. EAPN strongly believes in the necessity for a reform of the current EU's fiscal framework, so austerity measures and budget cuts are prevented, and public investment with a strong social lens is increased. **We envision an EU fiscal framework that is fair and that meets the needs of the most vulnerable people.**

²⁰ EAPN. (2016, August 16). *EAPN releases its 10 arguments in support of Active Inclusion*. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <https://www.eapn.eu/eapn-releases-its-10-arguments-in-support-of-active-inclusion/>

²¹ EAPN. (2022). *Key Messages on Access to Essential Services*. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/eapn-KEY-MESSAGES-on-access-to-essential-services-5558.pdf

²² EAPN perceives tax justice as a tax system with higher taxes on high-income earners and higher capital and corporate taxes.

²³ EAPN. (2018, August 30). *Social Protection for All! How can the Social Pillar and SDGs build stronger welfare states?* Retrieved December 20, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/20132-2/



Above all, the crisis has made it clear how important it is for a country to have quality public institutions, a robust universal territorial public health service capable of covering the entire population, a welfare system and social safety nets. How important it is to have a government willing to act and able to do it effectively to protect citizens, especially those with low incomes and without job security, even from the economic fallout of the pandemic.

— EAPN Italy



What is Missing for a Social Europe?

Achieving the EPSR Poverty Reduction Target

The EU announced the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (EPSR) Action Plan in 2021, converting the 20 principles and rights of the EPSR into concrete actions to benefit those living in the EU. The end goal of the EPSR Action Plan is to achieve “a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive and full of opportunities.”²⁴ The Action Plan has three targets, one of which is **the reduction target of 15 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2030**, out of which, at least 5 million should be children. On 16 June 2022, EU Employment and Social Affairs Ministers presented their [national targets](#) and as stated in the [2023 Annual Sustainable Growth Survey](#) “progress towards the EU and national targets will be monitored as from this European Semester cycle, starting with the Commission proposal for the 2023 Joint Employment Report.”²⁵ Figure 1 shows this.

²⁴ *The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles*. European Commission. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

²⁵ *2023 European Semester: Autumn package*. (2022, November 22). European Commission. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2023-european-semester-autumn-package_en

EU-27 Contribution to the EPSR Poverty Reduction Target

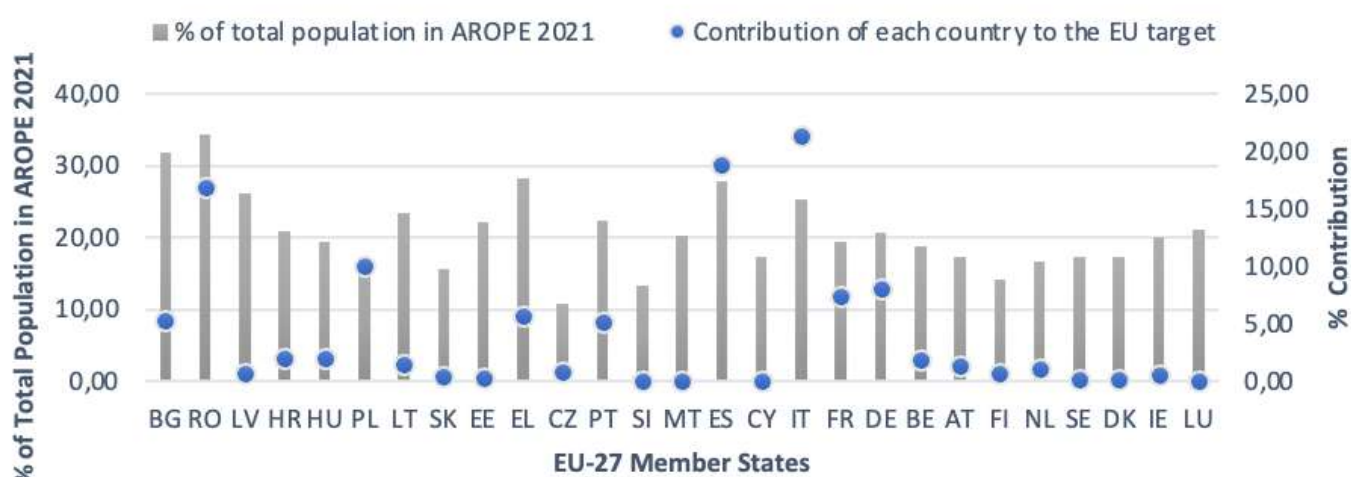


Figure 1 - Overview of EU-27 and their National Poverty Reduction Targets²⁶

Figure 1 has countries organised from left to right from the lowest GDP per capita (Bulgaria) to the highest (Luxembourg), according to Eurostat 2021 data.²⁷ We can see that countries like Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy have very ambitious targets. However, we must take into consideration that they have the lowest GDP per capita. On the other hand, the Netherlands, for instance, has a higher number of AROPE compared to its national target. Yet, the Dutch national target is lower than Romania's target.

EAPN regrets to see 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 distribution of the target, with solidarity measures among Member States. Yet this is not reflected in the current national targets. We see time and time again that the EU offers no comprehensive EU strategy when it comes to social rights: this is always left to Member States, which in the current case, is leading to an unfair distribution of the EU poverty reduction target.

²⁶ The % of total population in AROPE 2021 was updated as of November 16th, 2022. Data from IT and PL is provisional. DK and DE express their national poverty reduction target as a reduction in the number of persons living in households with very low work intensity. MT expresses its national poverty reduction target as a reduction of the AROPE rate by 3.1%, but EAPN Europe attempted to compute this.

²⁷ Eurostat. (2022). *Real GDP per capita*. Retrieved December 7, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/SDG_08_10 Kindly note that data from HR, HU, ES, PT, EL, CY, DE, BE, NL and LU is provisional.

Adequacy of Social Protection Schemes

EAPN views social protection as more than just the provision of basic needs. Social protection schemes are key instruments for creating socially just societies and therefore must be embedded in social policies that promote social justice, social security, social coherence, democracy and well-being. They “have a preventive and sustainable effect; strengthen the resilience of individuals, families and communities and enhance the[ir] capability to react to risks of life.”²⁸ Consequently, they are extremely important to people experiencing poverty as they may be their only source of income, they therefore rely on them to survive and have a decent life. **Adequate social protection for all, throughout the lifecycle, allows individuals, both those who can and cannot work, to live in dignity and is the cornerstone of an inclusive Europe, free of poverty.**²⁹

In times of multiple crises, it is normal that the need for social protection benefits is greater. To ease the impact of the unequal times of crises, new temporary benefits have been created since 2020. In some countries, the amount even increased (EE, FI, HR, ES, IE, BG). Sadly, our members reported that **both the new and the social benefits already in place were inadequate in the face of inflation and the cost-of-living crisis and thus failed to lift people out of poverty** (EE, NL, FR, PT, BG, ES, LV, NO, EL, LT, PL, IFSW, AT, HR).

The only exception is Ireland and Italy, with EAPN Ireland reporting that the COVID-19 emergency income support, which ended in 2022, helped reduce the levels of those at risk of poverty to 11.6% in 2021. Furthermore,

²⁸ International Federation of Social Workers. (2016, October 3). *The Role of Social Work in Social Protection Systems: The Universal Right to Social Protection*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.ifsw.org/the-role-of-social-work-in-social-protection-systems-the-universal-right-to-social-protection/?fbclid=IwAR2KBzQUSJw_6mYcOPaFSXua_dwip3DA9-oeXI-BqWHOKb-EzO3A1AH5RtFM

²⁹ *EAPN answers the European Commission Consultation on Access to Social Protection for All Workers*. (2018, February 14). EAPN. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/eapn-answers-the-european-commission-consultation-on-access-to-social-protection-for-all-workers/

the measures that the Italian government has put in place to support families in distress have had a considerable impact on the absolute poverty status of families and individuals residing in Italy. They have allowed about 840,000 Italians and 180,000 migrants not to experience absolute poverty.

But overall, as highlighted by EAPN Croatia, the minimum income amount is not even enough to cover the minimum food costs for people experiencing poverty. EAPN Lithuania reported that the amount of the benefit was approximately four times lower than the poverty risk threshold and more than two times lower than the absolute poverty risk threshold. It also emphasised that a quarter of the recipients of social benefits were children. **For these reasons, EAPN demands automatic indexation and case-by-case management of social benefits coupled with their benchmarking by reference budgets of goods and services, so that they can match the recipients' actual needs and cost of living.**

EAPN strongly believes that social protection is not only about social justice or human rights. It is also a good investment from an economic point of view: as people experiencing poverty spend their social benefits on essential costs of living expenses, including housing (as way too often they cannot afford to make savings), social benefits operate as automatic stabilisers and function as an economic stimulus package, contributing to more cohesion and better social inclusion. They can also help safeguard aggregate economic demand in times of crises and beyond, therefore they must be adequate and accessible to all in need.³⁰

Having a balanced diet is difficult because fruits and vegetables are very expensive.

— EAPN Portugal

30 Expert Study on a Binding EU Framework on Adequate National Minimum Income Schemes | A. Van Lancker, A. Aranguiz, H. Verschueren. (2021, May 6). EAPN. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/expert-study-on-a-binding-eu-framework-on-adequate-national-minimum-income-schemes-a-van-lancker-a-aranguiz-h-verschueren/

To EAPN Greece, Estonia and Portugal it is also clear that social benefits are not accessible as there is a difficult administrative burden involved. Many of our members also reported that many vulnerable groups still struggle to access social benefits, be it because of the strict eligibility criteria, inadequate conditionality rules or insufficient measures to address the non-take-up issue (CY, PT, BG, ES, LV, NO, LT, HR, AT, DE, EL, CZ, SI). In Germany, for instance, 54% of households eligible for unemployment benefits did not apply for it. EAPN Greece reported that minimum income beneficiaries are usually about 220,000 households out of 765,372 households at risk of income poverty (much less than 1/3). **Social benefits are human rights, therefore tackling the non-take-up of social benefits is long overdue.**

Moreover, it is important to highlight the **lack of support given to persons with disabilities**. Slovenia, Norway, Lithuania and Latvia emphasised how low the disability allowance is, “barely sufficient to cover essential costs.” EAPN Austria reported that their disability allowance keeps being drastically cut and that during the past 20 years, neither short-term unemployment benefits nor long-term unemployment assistance have been adjusted for inflation.

It is also worthwhile noting that despite the pension benefit amount having increased in Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania, according to Eurostat, in 2020, **Lithuanian women received 15% lower pensions than men.** *“These are the result of three magnitudes, in each of which there exist systematic sex differences: Pay per hour, hours worked (part-time, self-employment), and years worked (where the number of interruptions, including unemployment, may be added as an additional variable). In each of these dimensions, women are, as a matter of record, in a disadvantageous position; some may be structural (or even due to discrimination), others may be due to other choices such as investment in human capital or labour market segmentation, others may be due to choices made by the individuals themselves.”*³¹ The pension gap is also, of course, related to the inequality in wages for the same work. Therefore, **EAPN calls on the EU and its Member States to close the gender pay gap and pension gap through a comprehensive**

31 European Commission, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, & Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale. (2015, December 10). *Men, women and pensions*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0aa19dd2-a22d-11e5-b528-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

intersectional lens that takes into account the situation of racialised women.³²

32 “Racialised women face obstacles in accessing quality jobs and, as a result, predominantly engage in occupations with a higher risk of developing occupational diseases, racialised women are more likely to have their symptoms dismissed by health providers.” from European Parliament, Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality. (2022, June 22). **Report on intersectional discrimination in the European Union: the socio-economic situation of women of African, Middle-Eastern, Latin-American and Asian descent** | A9-0190/2022 | European Parliament. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0190_EN.html

The aftershock of austerity: the case of Greece

EAPN Greece highlighted a major national problem: the systematic delay in the payment of public pensions due to financial constraints, technical reasons, successive changes in the [legal framework](#) and the insurance system and the unconditional consolidation of the insurance funds into one. The pensions that had not been paid for years (which had reached 400,000) were a form of hidden public debt. In 2020, the European Commission implicitly obliged the Greek government to manage the problem and the total number of pensions has been seemingly reduced through the granting of temporary low pensions. In 2022, the National Social Security Institution stated that an average of 22,500 new pension applications are cleared per month, that the number will increase to 35,000 per month and that 113,000 awards were cleared in the first five months of 2022. However, other calculations show an increase in pending pensions due to new applications and cases from past years not being counted. The Council of State has irrevocably ruled unconstitutional the cuts in supplementary pensions and allowances in main and supplementary pensions, which caused endless legal disputes between pensioners and the Greek state for a decade (2012-2022). It is estimated that between 250,000 and 400,000 pensioners have appealed in court and have been vindicated, while about 1.5 million pensioners who did not appeal while awaiting legislative regulation appear to have lost their rights for good.

Inclusive Labour Market

In line with the [Active Inclusion Strategy](#) developed by the European Commission in 2008, EAPN finds it vital that vulnerable groups have personalised pathway support to quality employment. **Quality employment in an inclusive labour market must include, among other things, adequate wages, social security, lifelong vocational training, available childcare**

policies and strong collective bargaining across all sectors.³³ In the context of the transition to a low-carbon economy, a clear commitment to upskilling and reskilling of workers is also crucial to ensure access to new green jobs.³⁴

From October 2021 to October 2022, unemployment fell in most EU countries. It rose in Cyprus and Malta and the values in Poland, Latvia and Estonia stagnated.³⁵ EAPN Lithuania reported that the social services for the unemployed are still underdeveloped and underfunded. The risk remains that people who do not receive adequate services will simply be written off the Employment Service and further marginalised with weaker links to the labour market. Job seekers need to be provided with integrated and tailored support, and actions to intensify the fight against long-term unemployment with individualised support over time, including during employment to make the transition period easier, must be taken (EAPN France).

EAPN Slovenia, Spain, Germany and Czechia continue to report in-work poverty.³⁶ In these cases, individuals are not able to save for emergency funds and therefore unable to afford unusual expenses (e.g. high energy bills or illness). At the EU level, 8.9% of EU-27 population aged 18 to 64 were in in-work poverty in 2021.³⁷ In the same year, in Germany, more than one in five employees, or 7.8 million people, worked in the low-wage sector. **EAPN believes that it is time to refocus institutional systems on the quality of work and protection from in-work poverty with adequate minimum wages that are poverty-proof and set in a non-discriminatory way.**³⁸

³³ EAPN. (2021, February 25). *EC Proposal for EU Directive on Minimum Wages*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://www.eapn.eu/the-eu-must-adopt-a-directive-on-minimum-wages-eapn-statement/>

³⁴ EAPN. (2022, April 14). *A Socially Just and Poverty-Proof Green Deal*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/a-socially-just-and-poverty-proof-green-deal-eapn-capacity-building-report/

³⁵ *Unemployment statistics*. (2022, December 1). Eurostat. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics

³⁶ EAPN defines in-work poverty as people experiencing poverty while being employed.

³⁷ *In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by age and sex - EU-SILC survey*. (2022, December 20). Eurostat. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/8c7f2c4f-0947-4271-9d6c-c2d038d2ca71?lang=en>

³⁸ EAPN. (2021, February 25). *EC Proposal for EU Directive on Minimum Wages*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://www.eapn.eu/the-eu-must-adopt-a-directive-on-minimum-wages-eapn-statement/>

On a positive note, Spain underwent a long-demanded labour reform, which improved the working conditions of those with precarious and atypical contracts. The first results for 2022 are consistent with the objectives pursued by the labour reform: there are more permanent contracts than ever before. From 132,431 in January 2021 to 316,841 in February 2022. This type of contract already represents 22% of all contracts signed and has a positive impact on Social Security (although temporary contracts remain the majority, standing at just over 1,100,000 in 2022).

The war in Ukraine has also impacted the European labour market and social protection schemes. In Estonia, refugees from Ukraine accounted for 11.1% of the registered unemployed in August 2022. Poland also reported that approximately 400,000 new refugees from Ukraine have found jobs. In contrast and more generally, Norway found that migrant groups have lower occupational participation than the rest of the population and that they are, therefore, more dependent on public benefits. This could be explained by weak ties to employment institutions, undeclared work, language barriers, discrimination in the labour market, lack of proper credentials and skills recognition (the administrative burdens of such processes, long response times, and impossibility to provide proof due to the fact that many refugees fled without their diplomas), among other factors.

Furthermore, ILGA Europe provides some insights on the discrimination LGBTI people face in the labour market. According to the second LGBTI survey, in 2019, 10% of respondents felt discriminated against when looking for a job, but this number rises to 32% for trans respondents and 27% for intersex respondents. In addition, the survey showed that 32% of LGBTI respondents who were in paid work had difficulty making ends meet. The proportion of LGBTI people in precarious employment is also higher than average, with trans and intersex people experiencing higher rates of socio-economic exclusion than cisgender LGB.³⁹ This is very often due to discrimination in education, healthcare, housing, and discrimination in accessing and staying in the labour market.

³⁹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2020, May 14). EU LGBTI Survey II. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2018/eu-lgbti-survey-ii>

Finally, Portugal and Slovakia highlighted the issue of youth unemployment⁴⁰ and Italy the alarming figure of 23.1% of young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) in 2021 compared to 13.1% of the EU-27 average.⁴¹ These are concerning numbers, and a concerted effort is needed to actively include young people, particularly NEETs, in society, beyond the labour market. **NEETs could be trained for green jobs and the required high-level skills, thus becoming actors for change in the transition to a greener, circular and climate-neutral economy in their community and region.**⁴²

"It should not be forgotten that this energy crisis also comes at a time when the health crises had already pushed some people into poverty, people who were just keeping their heads out of the water. Thus, precarious students who were no longer able to work casual jobs, especially in the restaurant industry, joined the ranks of people seeking food aid, such as employees left behind with technical unemployment. Those people have seen their career paths, some academic, other professional, turned upside down."

— EAPN France

⁴⁰ For the purposes of this assessment, young people are those aged between 15-29.

⁴¹ *Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training*. (2022, May). Eurostat. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training

⁴² EAPN. (2022, February 24). *Social and Labour Aspects of the Just Transition towards Climate Neutrality*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/social-and-labour-aspects-of-the-just-transition-towards-climate-neutrality-eapn-position-paper/

Affordable and Quality Housing

Access to affordable⁴³ and quality housing and eradicating homelessness are crucial current challenges: it is estimated that 4.3% of the EU-27 population is in severe housing deprivation.⁴⁴ Many of our members report that the number of homeless people is high (BE, IE, DE, IFSW, HR, SI, NL)⁴⁵ and that the supply of affordable housing is low (EE, BE, IE, EL, CZ, IFSW, FR, NL, HR, SK, SI).⁴⁶ Indeed, **Housing Europe** found in their latest report that **“the size of the social housing sector in a number of countries is way too small compared to demand often with as many households on waiting lists as those living in social housing.** The sector finds itself under pressure with increasing demand from different target groups – from the homeless to key workers, and most recently people fleeing the war in Ukraine...[and] middle-class households.”⁴⁷ Our members confirm this. EAPN Belgium reported that 50,871 households (or 133,000 people) are currently waiting for social housing and that in the last 12 years the number of known homeless people (including minors) in Brussels has more than tripled. EAPN France and IFSW also highlighted that the waiting times in France are seven to ten years on average.

⁴³ “Housing is affordable when housing of an acceptable minimum standard can be obtained and retained leaving sufficient income to meet essential non-housing expenditure.” from European Commission. (2018). *Policy orientations for affordable housing in European cities*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/background_paper_on_affordability_iut_2018.pdf

⁴⁴ *Severe housing deprivation rate by age, sex and poverty status - EU-SILC survey*. (2022, September 9). Eurostat. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/d656727a-3c62-4fcc-b553-f8b1e8fe0d-ef?lang=en>

⁴⁵ In a study conducted by the European Commission conducted among a sample of European cities and towns, composed of 133 local administrations across 16 EU Member States, the total number of inhabitants covered by the surveyed was almost 33 million, among which 41,280 homeless people were observed: European Commission. (2022, July 1). *Homelessness in EU Cities and Towns Before and During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Main Challenges and Ways Forward*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://doi.org/10.2760/223202>

⁴⁶ Eurocities. (2020, November 24). *Access to affordable and social housing and support to homeless people*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://eurocities.eu/latest/+access-to-affordable-and-social-housing-and-support-to-homeless-people/>

⁴⁷ Housing Europe. (2022, June 10). *The State of Housing in Europe 2022*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.housingeurope.eu/resource-1705/the-state-of-housing-in-europe-2022

Furthermore, EAPN Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Greece and Croatia report **some social houses being overcrowded⁴⁸ and/or having inadequate living conditions**. The inadequate living conditions reported by our members include humidity, architectural barriers, poor insulation or accommodation with no bathroom, no electricity and/or no water. EAPN Croatia also found that some people live in boats, caravans, basements and garages.⁴⁹

A G-rated home, which I pay my rent for. A home which I will never be able to afford the repairs for. When it rains my roof leaks, and water pours in. When it's windy the windows rattle, yet we are expected to be thankful we have a roof over our heads and the funny thing is we are. Damages are not covered by the landlord and I am expected to have home insurance. I was only notified of this after a major leak which cost over a thousand euros worth of damage to furniture. I had no choice but to take out a loan to cover the cost and the cycle continues. I feel let down by the system, I feel left behind, I feel it's my fault I was not born into better circumstances to provide better for my children.

— EAPN Ireland

⁴⁸ "In 2020, 17.5 % of the EU population lived in an overcrowded household" from *Living conditions in Europe - housing*. (2022, May). Eurostat. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_housing

⁴⁹ European Network Against Racism. (2020). *#CovidImpact - Lifting structural barriers: A priority in the fight against racism*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://indd.adobe.com/view/16e0ec05-6afb-4383-97fe-16359b9c8ca9>

On top of this, **the cost of housing has been increasing since 2013 and therefore continues to be unaffordable for people experiencing poverty.**⁵⁰ Across the EU, it is estimated that 8.3% of the population in 2021 spent 40% or more of their household disposable income on housing, whereas in Greece the percentage was 28.8%.⁵¹ Moreover, EAPN Belgium highlighted that the problems of accessibility, affordability, quality and housing security in the private rental market are significant: more than one household in five does not have decent housing.

Additionally, EAPN Ireland and Lithuania report inadequate protections for tenants. Similarly, **EAPN Slovenia underlined the discrimination vulnerable groups are facing in accessing the rental market. Landlords are explicitly avoiding families, women, migrants, as well as individuals with social assistance benefits.** ILGA Europe also highlighted that 29% of intersex respondents and 25% of trans respondents have had some kind of housing difficulty in their lifetime, compared to 17% for cisgender LGB respondents.⁵²

Lastly, the Slovenian Red Cross and Regional Association Ljubljana emphasised how in Slovenia those eligible can apply for state housing funds must pay a deposit of six months' rent. On top of that, the apartments are not furnished. **These provisions are putting people experiencing poverty, including refugees, in an extremely vulnerable situation where they have to borrow money to access the state housing fund programme, forcing them into risk of over-indebtedness.**

⁵⁰ "Since 2013, the increase in house prices has exceeded household income growth in 21 Member States and by more than 20 percentage points in 11 Member States, with most of this increase having occurred recently." From European Commission. (2022, March 11). *Housing Market Developments in the Euro Area: Affordability*. www.consilium.europa.eu/media/55286/eg-housing-affordability.pdf; "While housing markets have recovered from the Global Financial Crisis in 2009, average house prices in the EU's private sector have increased by over 30% in the past decade and rents have gone up by almost 15%." from Housing Europe. (2021, March 26). *The state of Housing in Europe in 2021*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.housingeurope.eu/resource-1540/the-state-of-housing-in-europe-in-2021

⁵¹ *Housing cost overburden rate*. (2022, December 14). Eurostat. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/b0b18a41-6fc5-4e6b-bde2-3dba247e889f?lang=en>

⁵² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2020, May 14). EU LGBTI Survey II. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2018/eu-lgbti-survey-ii>

"Decent homes should be a standard and a political priority"

— Sabrina Iannazzone, EAPN Policy Officer.⁵³

The current situation is jeopardising people's right to live in affordable and decent houses, impacting disproportionately people experiencing poverty and vulnerable communities. It is urgent that Member States **secure strong decent housing standards for all**, including "ambitious Minimum Energy Performance Standards with social safeguards."⁵⁴ **Investing in the right to quality affordable, energy-efficient housing, including public social housing, should be seen as a priority intervention policy to prevent homelessness and tackle housing exclusion as well as reduce poverty and social exclusion.** It should be a foundation for the right to a dignified life.⁵⁵

⁵³ Right to Energy Coalition. (2022, October 19). *Buildings directive must deliver warm homes for winters to come*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://righttoenergy.org/2022/10/19/buildings-directive-must-deliver-warm-homes-for-winters-to-come/>

⁵⁴ EAPN. (2022, November 7). *RzE Coalition Letter – Energy saving, gas saving, lifesaving*. www.eapn.eu/r2e-coalition-letter-energy-saving-gas-saving-lifesaving/

⁵⁵ EAPN. (2017, January 31). *Nobody left behind*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/nobody-left-behind-eapn-booklet-on-services/

A Socially Just Green Transition For All

To the surprise of many, the current energy crisis did not start with the war in Ukraine. **Back in 2019, almost 80 million people in the EU were late or unable to pay their utility bills.**⁵⁶ The energy crisis was already driven by a fossil fuel supply crisis (particularly fossil natural gas), weather extremes, speculation in the energy market and Europe's dependency on fossil gas (including for electricity). Additionally, the wholesale electricity pricing mechanism, meaning that all suppliers – including cheaper renewables such as wind or solar – receive the same price of the last plant used to meet consumers' demand, which is often gas. Since gas is expensive, this means that final electricity prices soar in periods of high demand and that the market is exposed to volatile prices (EE, PT, BG, DE, IE, LV, NO, EL, CZ, PL, BE, CY, FR, LT, NL, ES, IT). The war in Ukraine has exacerbated the energy crisis due to cuts in supply of Russian gas. Altogether, this has increased the number of people living in energy poverty (PT, ES, LV, IE, NO, EL, LT) and is **disproportionately impacting low-income households, already left to make impossible choices between energy, rent, health and food.**⁵⁷

In Ireland, the estimated share of households in energy poverty has reached unprecedented levels in 2022: 29%, compared to 8% in 2020 in the EU-27.⁵⁸ According to Statistics Estonia, electricity and piped gas reaching homes in June 2022 were 129.6% and 228.3% more expensive than a year ago. EAPN Lithuania found that almost one in ten people were in arrears with their util-

⁵⁶ *About Energy Poverty*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://righttoenergy.org/about-energy-poverty/>

⁵⁷ European Commission. (2019). *Energy poverty through the lens of EU Research & Innovation projects*. Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC113953>

⁵⁸ The previously high record in Ireland was 23% in 1994/95; *8% of EU population unable to keep home adequately warm*. (2021, November 5). Eurostat. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20211105-1>

ity bills.⁵⁹ EAPN Slovenia reported that there have been too many disconnections of the electricity supply. EAPN Greece stated that more than 10% of households faced health issues due to inadequate cooling or heating in their residence.⁶⁰ Furthermore, in Portugal, one of the major contributing factors to energy poverty and high energy costs is related to the poor energy efficiency of buildings: the proportion of the population below the risk of poverty threshold affected by this dimension of energy poverty was 56% and above this threshold was 30.1%.

Climate change has a particular impact on people experiencing poverty, which is why EAPN demands long-overdue climate justice, strongly interlinked with social justice. Heat waves and extreme temperatures caused by the climate crisis brought about a new phenomenon such as summer energy poverty in Spain. 14% of Spaniards were unable to keep their homes at 26 degrees during heat waves, according to data from the Foessa Foundation. In many cases, these are homes without air conditioning or fans. Nevertheless, having cooling devices does not guarantee relief from heatwaves either. To simply switch them on, even sparingly, Foessa estimates that a family of four spends 25 euros a week, about 100 euros a month. The amount is less than what is required in winter, when it takes 40 euros a week - 160 euros a month - to keep the house at 21 degrees, but it represents a huge outlay in these households.

Although many governments created emergency energy subsidies (EE, NL, FR, PT, BG, ES, LV, EL, CZ, SK, SI), they have proved to be inadequate or inaccessible, with many still having difficulties paying for energy bills. To EAPN, **both EU and national energy policies have failed to address the multidimensionality and intersectionality of energy poverty as structural solutions are often sacrificed or postponed for the benefit of urgent and short-term solutions.**

⁵⁹ In 2021, 6.4% of households in the EU-27 had been unable to pay utility bills on time: *Arrears on utility bills - EU-SILC survey*. (2022, December 20). Eurostat. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/book-mark/7442c1ff-b597-4db4-a7c9-d590f70f1346?lang=en>

⁶⁰ *Energy Poverty Handbook*. (2021, September). The Greens/EFA in the European Parliament. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/2nd-edition-update-of-energy-poverty-handbook-greens-efa-group/

"In winter, I sometimes sleep with a hat on. It is very cold at night, they turn off the heating and I freeze. I have a fever in the morning when I get up, I shake. I don't want to turn on heating or air conditioning for financial reasons."

— Macedonian Anti Poverty Platform

Energy poverty is a multidimensional concept that is not easily captured by a single indicator. It results from deeply structural inequalities in housing, taxation, energy, climate, gender, economic and employment policies, which magnifies deteriorating living conditions of many people/communities (e.g. migrant women living on low-incomes and in poorly-insulated housing). People below the poverty line are particularly impacted due to digital poverty and inaccessible funding programmes and information (energy efficiency vouchers, renovation schemes, etc.).

Thus, **EAPN calls for a systematic distributional impact assessment of all energy and climate proposals to ensure that the least responsible for high energy prices and climate change do not pay the highest prices.** People experiencing poverty must be included in the green transition, and not be left to pay for it by getting locked in the fossil gas infrastructure. We also demand that the clean energy transition is accelerated to end dependency on fossil fuels and to launch the decarbonisation of buildings in which vulnerable households reside. **Access to clean and affordable energy must be stated as a fundamental right and a pre-condition to a life in dignity for all.**⁶¹ To achieve this, we must have redistributive measures in energy policies (progressive green tax systems, environmental tax incentives and revenue recycling, for example), a regulatory approach restricting unfair activities for people and the environment, and a reform of the current

⁶¹ EAPN. (2021, November 11). *Energy poor must not bear the costs of soaring energy prices*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/eapn-statement-energy-poor-must-not-bear-the-costs-of-soaring-energy-prices/

electricity market through the revision of the generation, distribution, and pricing mechanism.

At very local level, energy communities can pave the way for a participatory affordable clean energy transition by promoting alternative energy ownership models and localised renewable energy systems. **One-stop shops are often the only instrument to make renovation and energy programs and funding accessible at local level.** One-stop shops at neighbourhood level play a fundamental role in joining-up critical information and providing tailor-made assistance. They can help to empower the final user to make choices, design schemes addressing unmet needs, and monitor the quality of processes and outcomes. In the long run, they could determine the social and cultural acceptability of policies adopted at national and/or EU level.

"We are 13 people at home, no one works, we only collect bottles and receive one social support. It is very difficult, we are sitting more hungry. We have a stove, nothing else. We don't have internet. If there are is no wood sneakers are burned, clothes, everything is going in the stove. It's harmful, I know, but freezing to death is also harmful."

— Macedonian Anti Poverty Platform

Affordable and Accessible Healthcare

The COVID-19 pandemic showed us how important it is to have access to affordable quality healthcare. **The pandemic further exacerbated the poorly structured healthcare systems that are not accessible or affordable to people experiencing poverty, due to decades of underinvestment and austerity measures.** European health systems are not meeting the needs of the most vulnerable people, only the ones who can afford to privately pay for it. Healthcare fees and the cost of medication are a source of financial hardship for people experiencing poverty. For instance, Latvian patients' ("out-of-pocket") payments exceed the World Health Organization limit of 5.6%.

EAPN Greece emphasised that 36.2% of the population could not afford to undergo medical examination or treatment. EAPN Slovakia reports that healthcare is generally accessible to all. Yet, they are facing a high number of resignations from hospital staff, and are now having hospitals closing down entire departments due to staff shortages. Our members also reported long waiting lists (EE, FI), high fees (FI, LV), low levels of COVID-19 vaccines (BG), high preventable mortality rate (LV), lack of healthcare staff and hospital supplies, including beds (CZ, SK), and lack of separate spaces to quarantine (SK). Many individuals also reported being concerned about the long-term effects of COVID-19.

Hospitals have been overwhelmed, health workers forced to work (at least in the initial stages) practically without personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, gowns, goggles and visors), nursing homes for the elderly were transformed into morgues, long lines to access COVID-19 tests have formed and schools have struggled to connect with children confined to their homes.

— EAPN Italy

Discrimination is clearly playing a key role in this unequal access to healthcare. EAPN Greece emphasised the extraordinarily persistent healthcare neglect of the most vulnerable populations and those living in remote areas, including those who do not speak the language, who did not have access to vaccination (refugees and migrants), those without residence permits and those suffering from mental-related illnesses. EAPN Bulgaria found this, coupled with the low quality of their healthcare system and considerable healthcare discrepancies at the regional level. EAPN Latvia reported the same for socially disadvantaged groups. EAPN Slovenia finds that the issue is mainly with those battling chronic health issues, particularly long-term drug users who are left out of almost all rehabilitation (and social security) programs. EAPN Italy also highlighted that access to healthcare depends on the place of residence.

"during the week when the children are with my ex-husband, there is hardly any food in the house. I once said that I would never cut back on my children's health care. Well, I'm obliged to do so in the current situation. I find that outrageous." (Testimony of a mother whose household income is €200 too high to benefit from the social tariff).

— EAPN Belgium

Additionally, ILGA Europe underlined **the discrimination trans people face in healthcare**. For instance, in countries where trans-specific healthcare is not covered by health insurance, trans people will have to spend a lot of their income on their own healthcare, thereby negatively impacting their socioeconomic situation. Additionally, where a psychiatric diagnosis is required for legal gender recognition, older trans people may experience barriers in access based on assessments of their personal capacity by mental health professionals and thus be unable to legally transition.

Moreover, Greece and Norway emphasised the issue with their dental care system: in Greece, **42.1% of the population did not undergo dental examination when they really needed it**. In Norway, health services are fully or partially reimbursed by the state through the National Insurance Scheme, but this does not apply to dental services. With the exception of people with certain diseases, no reimbursement of dental expenses is given to adults over 20 years of age. After this, a regular check at the dentist will cost around 1,000 NOK (around 97€)⁶², and many cannot afford a dental check-up or dental treatment. In practice, this means that **many with low-income postpone a visit to the dentist until the pain has become so**

⁶² As of 1 December 2022.

great they cannot take it anymore. In addition, EAPN Norway found that some people choose to pull teeth instead of repairing them because it is the “cheapest” solution.

Vulnerable groups’ diet is monotonous and unhealthy and the food aid packages offered by humanitarian organisations are ungainly, simple and very inappropriate for making a healthy meal. The ingredients are mostly simple sugars and carbohydrates, which can contribute to different diseases, which the users face as a result of their lifestyle (diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, cholesterol, etc.)

— EAPN Slovenia

The past two years have also led to a deterioration of people’s mental health and a rise in mental health problems (FI, EL, CZ, SI, PT, SK). Although the causes are varied, the most common ones have been social isolation and long hours of work. Indeed, **EAPN Greece found that 74.9% majority of the population faced issues with their mental health during the COVID-19 quarantine periods.**

Affordable and accessible mental health support can be the difference between life and death. Slovakia reported an increase in the number of completed suicides in 2021 compared to previous years in all age groups. The highest increase occurred in the age range of 15- to 19-year-olds and the number of “***calls for help***” has more than tripled. EAPN Czechia found that the worst mental health status is reported by people living in households that are in a difficult economic situation. In 2022, symptoms of depression and anxiety have increased among people who subjectively experience

economic hardship, are in in-work poverty or are struggling with high energy bills.

***"The majority of young people would like to see services adopt more inclusive language and imagery in their communication materials. This is particularly important to disabled and LGBTQ+ young people of colour. Other examples of recommendations to services from LGBTQ+ young people include shorter copies of communication materials, more individualised support and more group support in their communities."**⁶³*

Mental health can affect anyone, but the impact on workers in the health-care sector and vulnerable groups, including children, young people, the unemployed, and the elderly has been exceptionally negative. As highlighted by EAPN Estonia and Greece, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll on hospital staff, causing overstress, due to the bulk of the work and fear as they had daily direct exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Therefore, **it is important to ensure quality working conditions for hospital staff and carers, including protecting their mental health.**

Lastly, the impact on children is particularly worrying. As emphasised by EAPN Greece, preschool and elementary children had no contact with children of their own age nor did they see their friends, resulting in possible gaps in their social skills and emotional intelligence. The situation is even worse for refugee children, both those who were placed in a completely

⁶³ akt. (2020). *the lgbtq+ youth homelessness report*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://online.pubhtml5.com/pvlw/mk-fk/#p=2>

new school and taught in a foreign language and, in particular, those not placed in school. In a study conducted by EAPN Portugal, there were several focus groups in which children clearly expressed the impact that the pandemic was having on their emotional well-being. References to fear, dread, sadness, worry, anxiety, loneliness, nervousness, discomfort, and tiredness were present in many of their speeches.⁶⁴

"First I pay rent, then electricity, if there is food left we will eat something, if not that's it. Finally, the phone, and that is why they turned me off. And for health we give money, children receive chronic therapy and they are a priority. For me, there is no opportunity for healthcare, for regular check-ups or for a dentist, I haven't been for years."

— Macedonian Anti Poverty Platform

In summary, it can be concluded that **Member States are putting insufficient investment into healthcare, which further makes healthcare a privilege and not a universal human right**. The privatisation of healthcare is a key issue, seriously endangering access to healthcare for people who experience poverty or are at risk of poverty. **Ensuring affordable, accessible and quality healthcare, including dental and mental care, for all must be an urgent priority for Europe.**

⁶⁴ Cátia Santos, Elizabeth Santos, Fátima Veiga, Paula Cruz, Teresa Dias, *A pandemia pela voz das crianças*, Cadernos EAPN 26, EAPN Portugal, 2022. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.pt/centro-de-documentacao/cadernos-26/

Affordable, Accessible and Quality Education

Education is yet another field that deserves attention, particularly when the European Commission has adopted a [proposal](#) to make 2023 the European Year of Skills. **Education systems are increasingly responding more to the labour market and employers' needs, as opposed to supporting personal development needs.** At EAPN, we call for public education to be universal, quality, inclusive, accessible and affordable. Poor education systems lead to poverty so education acts as a social determinant of the transmission of inter-generational poverty. Therefore, it is key to remove financial and other obstacles faced by vulnerable groups and people in poverty in accessing education, vocational training, and lifelong learning at all stages and to tackle the root causes of poor educational performance, including early school leaving. **The European Year of Skills is an excellent opportunity for Member States to shift towards a holistic approach to education (including early childhood education and care),⁶⁵ vocational training and lifelong learning, by defining education throughout the life course as a social right.⁶⁶**

The phenomenon of educational poverty is marked by multidimensional factors, both material-economic poverty and conditions of fragility and deprivation from the relational and educational point of view of the school. There is a clear education gap between socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and rural and urban areas (EAPN Lithuania), due to the lack of teachers, support specialists, modern educational tools and access to non-formal education outside school, and other factors. In Italy, the school dropout rate, which considers the percentage of young people who leave

⁶⁵ EU Alliance for Investing in Children. (2022, December 9). *More ambitious targets are needed to ensure all children have access to quality early childhood education and care*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/more-ambitious-targets-are-needed-to-ensure-all-children-have-access-to-quality-early-childhood-education-and-care/

⁶⁶ EAPN. (2020, April 10). *Ensuring Education, Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/leaving-nobody-behind-ensuring-education-vocational-training-and-lifelong-learning-contrib-utes-to-the-prevention-and-reduction-of-poverty-and-social-exclusion-eapn-key-issues-and-promising-pract/

school and training paths prematurely in 2021 was 12.7, out of a European average of 9.7. It was highest in the regions of Sicily, Campania, Calabria and Puglia.

Sadly, having a secondary education level does not protect individuals from poverty and/or being socially excluded due to youth unemployment, in-work poverty, labour market discrimination, and unpaid internships, amongst other factors. In Spain, individuals who attained primary and secondary (compulsory) education have the highest AROPE rates by educational attainment: 37.2% and 34.4% respectively.

The conditions of the population have also worsened with respect to where you live: the further you are from large urban agglomerations (suburbs, countryside, mountainous areas, countryside), the further you are from health and social services. Those who suffer are children in need of speech therapy, motor rehabilitation, the dependent elderly, the disabled, ...

— EAPN Italy

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a new barrier for children: remote learning. EAPN Portugal emphasised that schools showed little preparation to deal with emergency remote learning. Given this, one can conclude that **remote learning exacerbated inequalities for children from low-income households** as children experienced social isolation, children's physical and mental health deteriorated due to the excessive use of ICT, and children from families with social risk factors had low participation in remote education. Digital poverty also played a key role. **In Lithuania, almost 3% of all pupils in the country did not have a computer**

and internet connection, and the situation was even worse in rural areas, where 6.2% did not have a computer nor internet connection.

In the study mentioned above, conducted by EAPN Portugal, children and teenagers reported that distance learning was harmful (referring to situations of distraction, difficulty concentrating, poor sleep, lack of motivation and lack of interest, among others), and socialising with friends during breaks had been impossible, leading to increasing isolation and loneliness. They expressed their displeasure with remote teaching and considered that real learning takes place in the classroom, with everything that involves school life (playgrounds, games, sports).⁶⁷

“Learning to read and write through an online computer is not for everyone... some had parents or adults at home who helped them to do things minimally, others did not. And there is a very important part of learning that was lost (...) the lack of bases will be noticed later on...”

— EAPN Portugal

If the situation for children experiencing poverty is bad, it is only worse for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In Lithuania, **students with visual or hearing impairments were unable to access special learning tools and found it more difficult to work independently on the computer and concentrate**. Remote learning support was not available for all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as some educational establishments did not have enough specialists available, which put most of the strain on the parents or caregivers.

⁶⁷ Cátia Santos, Elizabeth Santos, Fátima Veiga, Paula Cruz, Teresa Dias, A pandemia pela voz das crianças, Cadernos EAPN 26, EAPN Portugal, 2022. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.pt/centro-de-documentacao/cadernos-26/

In Estonia, it is particularly concerning that the teaching force is predominantly elderly, with many senior teachers who will inevitably retire soon. EAPN Estonia found that young people are reluctant to become teachers because of the low wages. Estonia is already facing a serious shortage of teachers, and EAPN Lithuania warns about a worse situation in 5 years.

Lastly, EAPN Greece found that unemployed, economically inactive and flexible workers have the least access to training and e-learning programmes and have limited digital skills. On the other hand, EAPN Czechia reports progress in improving the quality and inclusiveness of education and training systems, including by promoting technical and digital skills and supporting the teaching profession.

In summary, in line with [UN Sustainable Development Goal 4](#) and Principle 1 of the EPSR, it is vital that the EU and its Member States **ensure inclusive, accessible, affordable and equitable quality education, promote lifelong learning opportunities and increase funds for public education systems.**

Addressing the Digital Divide

The digitalisation of European economies and services is negatively impacting people experiencing poverty and vulnerable groups. **Digital poverty and its different manifestations are increasingly among the factors that exclude the most vulnerable people from accessing services of general interest.**⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Defined by EAPN as the inability to interact correctly with digital tools and spaces, due to the lack of skills, resources or internet connection.

As emphasised by EAPN Finland, some people cannot afford the necessary equipment and connectivity, nor do they possess the skills and support needed to use digital tools. In Spain, many households in poverty lack access to the Internet: only 58.1% of households with an income of less than 900 euros per month have some kind of computer, compared to 97.4% of those with an income of more than 2,500 euros per month. Generally speaking, 45% of the Portuguese population still lacks basic digital skills. The digital divide among students from disadvantaged backgrounds or living in remote areas has also been illustrated above.

Moreover, EAPN Greece emphasised that access to social protection schemes or essential services is done digitally, yet 53.8% do not know or cannot use the internet for such purposes. EAPN Spain also reports that **digital poverty is one of the main reasons people do not apply for social benefits, including minimum income.**

"Seeing grandfather on the cell phone is not the same as being with grandfather"

— EAPN Portugal

When talking about digital tools, we often take digital safety and data protection for granted. However, **law enforcement bodies are increasingly using personal data and artificial intelligence to surveil, target, detain, deport and/or criminalise vulnerable groups.**⁶⁹ Our member PICUM, emphasised that "the growing use of digital technology and the large-scale processing of personal data for immigration enforcement follows the tendency to blur the line between immigration control and security goals. The result is increased surveillance of and discrimination against people of co-

⁶⁹ According to Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, "pegasus spyware is reportedly being used in 45 countries, often in total secrecy and outside of any legal framework." From Bachelet, M. (2022, April 25). *Human rights and democracy in the digital age*. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/04/human-rights-and-democracy-digital-age

lour, religious and ethnic minorities.”⁷⁰ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that “States need to conduct human rights due diligence when designing and developing surveillance [technologies and] encourage public debate about their use. Without appropriate safeguards, the world risk[s] walking into a reality where privacy [is] an unobtainable goal.”⁷¹

Furthermore, digital platforms are not inclusive by design as they reflect the bias of the designer. For instance, as underlined by the **European Blind Union**, “millions of persons with disabilities in the EU still face exclusion from digital participation due to lack of accessibility [and affordability] of online platforms and digital services. [Additionally,] children and young people using assistive technologies can be at risk of their disability being exposed against their will and discriminated due to algorithms in social media or search engines, if websites detect their use.”⁷²

Young people and minority groups are also increasingly exposed to online hate speech and cyberbullying. This is especially concerning because “too often, hate speech is followed by hate crimes and violence.”⁷³ Moreover, our member, ENAR highlighted the racial biases and algorithmic discrimination in artificial intelligence-based solutions for human resources.⁷⁴ This is proof of how digital spaces increasingly expose certain groups to further stigmatisation, making it urgent to have case-by-case management in social services.

⁷⁰ PICUM. (2019). *Dismantling the Use of Big Data to Deport*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://picum.org/data-protection-and-digital-technologies/>

⁷¹ *Human Rights Council Concludes Interactive Dialogues on the Right to Development and Starts to Discuss the Right to Privacy*. (2022, September 16). Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/09/human-rights-council-concludes-interactive-dialogues-right-development-and

⁷² European Blind Union. (2021). *European Blind Union response to the European Commission's public consultation on a set of European Digital Principles*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/response_to_consultation_on_a_set_of_european_digital_principles_aug_2021.pdf

⁷³ *Report: Online hate increasing against minorities, says expert*. (2021, March 23). Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/03/report-online-hate-increasing-against-minorities-says-expert

⁷⁴ “AI...can exacerbate and compound existing inequalities... discrimination, racism, exclusion and poverty” from idem 32; European Network Against Racism. (2020, March 16). *Artificial intelligence in HR: how to address racial biases and algorithmic discrimination in HR?* Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.enar-eu.org/artificial-intelligence-in-hr-how-to-address-racial-biases-and-algorithmic-discrimination-in-hr/

In conclusion, there is no denying that digitalisation allows greater access to services of general interest, but we have also explored how the over-reliance on digitalisation leads to social inequalities as people experiencing poverty cannot access their fundamental rights (e.g. healthcare, labour market, social benefits, digital safety), information or even work or study remotely without adequate support and the costly equipment needed. Digitalisation “can also create barriers if the systems, information [and] processes are not accessible and interoperable with assistive technologies.”⁷⁵ Lastly, socio-cultural resistance to using digital tools, especially amongst the ageing population, is an issue. To EAPN, it is clear that **digitalisation should be an option rather than an obligation.**

⁷⁵ European Blind Union. (2021). European Blind Union response to the European Commission's public consultation on a set of European Digital Principles. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/response_to_consultation_on_a_set_of_european_digital_principles_aug_2021.pdf



The Experience of Poverty for Vulnerable Groups

Vulnerable groups such as migrants, women, Roma,⁷⁶ racialised communities, LGBTI, children, elderly, persons with disabilities and youth have been disproportionately impacted by the unequal times of crises we are living in, as **they face multiple forms of domination, marginalisation and exploitation. This is manifested through racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, heterosexism, classism, homophobia and transphobia and expressed through violence, segregation as well as discriminatory and exclusionary policies.** These systemic and structural policies include lack of legal status or registration, policing, human rights violations and criminalisation. For instance, whilst Europe opened its arms to Ukrainian refugees, it remained a “fortress” to racialised refugees. The latter were often confronted with “fundamental rights abuses, illegal pushbacks, and horrific violence at EU borders”⁷⁷ by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.⁷⁸

These policies mean that these vulnerable groups have **weaker connections to the labour market and/or struggle to access social benefits and social protection schemes** due to the strict eligibility criteria, conditionality rules and or inadequate measures to address the high rates of non-take-up. Consequently, they are much more likely to be involved in undeclared and informal work.⁷⁹ As a result, they are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion, which is manifested by **insufficient and unequal access to essential services** (such as housing, healthcare and education) and **social protection systems, energy poverty, digital poverty, food poverty, smaller support systems, high policing and surveillance, and criminalisation.** EAPN Czechia, for example, emphasised how households with

⁷⁶ “The umbrella term ‘Roma’ encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.).” from *Roma equality, inclusion and participation in the EU*. (2020, October 7). European Commission. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://commission.europa.eu/content/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu_en

⁷⁷ *Frontex: MEPs Vote to Refuse Approval of Budget, Commission “Shocked” by OLAF Report but Confident in Management Board as Agency Calls Misconduct “Practices of the Past” NGOs Find No Difference*. (2022, October 21). European Council on Refugees and Exiles. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://ecre.org/frontex-meps-vote-to-refuse-approval-of-budget-commission-shocked-by-olaf-report-but-confident-in-management-board-as-agency-calls-misconduct-practices-of-the-past/>

⁷⁸ For these reasons, in October 2022 the European Parliament voted to refuse the approval of the 2020 Frontex budget, as an attempt to stop EU money being used for human rights violations. Read more at: *Frontex: EU Parliament refuses 2020 Frontex budget discharge*. (2022, May 5). Greens/EFA. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.greens-efa.eu/en/article/press/frontex-eu-parliament-refuses-2020-frontex-budget-discharge; Fair Trials. (2022, November 30). *Frontex: Why is the EU funding human rights abuses?* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pejvQe9rDA

⁷⁹ EAPN defines informal work as unpaid labour, such as domestic labour and care responsibilities. Undeclared work is often seen as “any paid activities that are lawful as regards their nature, but not declared to public authorities, taking into account differences in the regulatory systems of the Member States”. *From European Platform tackling undeclared work*. European Labour Authority. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.ela.europa.eu/en/undeclared-work


low levels of education are below the poverty line. This section will provide a snapshot of some of the experiences of poverty reported by our members that work on the ground with these communities.

On 13 October 2022, EAPN launched its preliminary findings and key recommendations at the European Parliament. During the event, Fair Trials, MEP Marie Toussaint, ILGA and PICUM addressed the issue of the criminalisation of poverty, in particular how policing bodies are not neutral in groups that are targeted and focus on people living in poverty. For undocumented people, it is even worse, as there is the added risk of arrest or deportation given the climate of oppression. Criminalisation is a vicious circle and obstructs the realisation of people's rights. It is impossible to address the criminalisation of poverty, without first addressing the root causes of racism and discrimination.

Migrants

As highlighted by PICUM as well as some of our members, migrants, overall, have higher levels of poverty and social exclusion than their citizens (NO, BE, IT, FI, DE, EL). For instance, EAPN Germany found that whilst those with German citizenship had an AROPE rate of 17.7%, migrants with EU citizenship had a rate of 25.3% and those from non-EU countries of 44.7%.

The case is even worse for undocumented migrants, who have no legal status/registration and therefore cannot access formal employment, essential services or social benefits. As Alyna Smith, Deputy Director at PICUM, during our launch event explained, in most EU countries, decent work permits are only available for people who are able to secure highly paid jobs, or in certain very specific occupations. When permits are available for jobs that require fewer qualifications, they are usually very restrictive,



relegating people to precarious work, with fewer rights and security than other workers. This is both a result of class bias, racial inequality and a policy framework that perpetuates and reproduces social inequalities and discrimination. It means the restrictions associated with work permits when they are issued create structural conditions for precarious or irregular work to continue in such sectors, and to block migrant workers in in-work poverty. Due to their vulnerability, undocumented migrants are “hesitant to report exploitation or abuse to labour inspectors, out of fear of losing their job and having their personal data transmitted to immigration authorities.”⁸⁰

Furthermore, EAPN Estonia found that one of the biggest problems is finding permanent housing for refugees in areas where there are also jobs - especially in the city of Tallinn because the rental markets in these areas are not ready to meet such high demand. As of August 23rd, 2022, 3,830 refugees lived in short-term accommodation provided by the state. Often, the place of temporary accommodation was a windowless cabin on a cruise ship, where refugees have been forced to live for several months.

⁸⁰ PICUM. (2021). *Navigating Irregularity: The Impact of Growing Up Undocumented in Europe*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Navigating-Irregularity_EN.pdf



I left my country because I didn't feel safe. I grew up with my grandmother, who was killed in front of my eyes by Boko Haram, the extremist Islamist terrorist organisation. I went through many obstacles to be able to cross the border of Turkey to feel safe away from my homeland. In January 2019 I arrived in Samos defying death. The boat sank off the coast of the Aegean. I was one of the lucky ones. After two years of living in Athens, they kicked me out of the apartment that the agency gives me because I got the residence permit. They tell me I have to rent a house and get a job to maintain it. I found a job, I live in an underground apartment with 7 roommates and I eat from the soup kitchen of the "Chora" organisation. I live without any dignity.

— David, 22 years old from Nigeria, DIOTIMA Greece

Women

Our members report that gender poverty is on the rise (LT, ES, BE, CY, CZ, EE, DE, HR, PT, AT, SI). According to Eurostat, in 2021, 22.6% of women are at greater AROPE than men (20.7%) in the EU-27 (21.7% in total).⁸¹ Women make up the majority of single and solo parents⁸² and bear the burden of unpaid domestic work, including informal care work (EAPN Cyprus). As a consequence, gender poverty is directly related to child poverty, therefore, tackling the gender poverty gap, including pay and care gaps, is fundamental to addressing the inter-generational transmission of poverty.

EAPN Czechia emphasised the difficult situation single and/or solo parents were put in in the last year as they had to be both parents and teachers. Their children did not have subsidised lunches at school (parents were forced to cook for their children at home), and difficult access to basic needs, especially for growing children (shoes, clothes) - therefore faced higher household costs. There has also been a slight increase among single and solo mothers, a group that has long had difficulty making ends meet.

⁸¹ *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by sex*. (2022, December 20). Eurostat. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/bookmark/c485f8e9-c30b-49e6-affc-997da69cf8da?lang=en>

⁸² EAPN defines solo parents as those who raise their children alone, while single parents may not be doing so as a matter of choice. Solo parents do not have a partner to raise their children, while single parents might share custody with a partner.

"I'm looking for a job, but when they hear that I have 6 children, I feel so useless."

— A woman experiencing poverty in Lithuania

Furthermore, the quarantines during the COVID-19 pandemic have put women at a higher risk of domestic violence (LT, SI). As a result, there are more and more solo parent families living in dire economic circumstances due to the strong link between violence and poverty. Women living in abusive relationships have fewer opportunities to leave, as their money is often controlled by their partner. Many women also cannot escape as they might depend on their partner for social protection and access to healthcare. Consequently, violence keeps them in poverty and isolates them from society. At the same time, women, especially women of colour, made up “the majority of workers in healthcare, retail, bakeries, and other businesses with essential products and services... [which] remained open during the lockdown periods.”⁸³ They were at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19, highlighting the crucial need for what was defined as essential workers during the pandemic, but who were – and still are – largely, poorly paid.

When talking about gender poverty, it is urgent to have an intersectional lens. As highlighted by ENAR, Muslim women wearing the hijab or other religious signs in the EU are “excluded from employment and education, and...the Court of Justice of the EU has failed to provide [them] any protection.”⁸⁴ This is particularly worrying, as “variations in the ways in which discrimination manifests for different people [e.g. women with disabilities, LGBTQI+ refugees] based on the combination of various identities is not

⁸³ European Network Against Racism. (2020). #CovidImpact – Lifting structural barriers: A priority in the fight against racism. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://indd.adobe.com/view/16e0ec05-6afb-4383-97fe-16359b9c8ca9>

⁸⁴ European Network Against Racism. (2022, February 4). *EU anti-racism action plan explained: Unlocking the potential of EU legislation to address structural racism*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.enar-eu.org/eu-anti-racism-action-plan-explained-unlocking-the-potential-of-eu-legislation-to-address-structural-racism/

only (mostly) not captured by the available statistical data, but also rarely addressed by anti-discrimination legislation in EU Member States.”⁸⁵

Children

Children are an extremely vulnerable group, and unfortunately, child poverty remains high in many of our members’ reports (FI, NL, CY, IT, BE, ES, NO, EL, LT, PL, IFSW, AT). Indeed, 24.4% of children in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2021 compared with 21.1% of adults. In Austria, one in four people experiencing poverty is a child, where most of their parents are excluded from the formal labour market, are single and/or solo parents, and/or have low-paid jobs.

This is particularly worrying as experiencing poverty as a child is likely to have life-long impacts. “Children living in poverty[, in particular, undocumented] often go hungry or eat a poor diet and families face challenges in offering decent shoes and clothing, necessary school supplies, internet at home, toys or even essentials like shower gel and shampoo.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ “Intersectionality looks at the ways in which various social categories such as gender, class, race, sexuality, disability, religion and other identity axes are interwoven on multiple and simultaneous levels. The discrimination resulting from these mutually reinforcing identities leads to systemic injustice and social inequality.” from European Network Against Racism. (2020, September 14). Report: Intersectional discrimination in Europe. www.enar-eu.org/intersectionalityreport/

⁸⁶ PICUM. (2021). Navigating Irregularity: The Impact of Growing Up Undocumented in Europe. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Navigating-Irregularity_EN.pdf

"As a child, I already knew that I was different from my classmates. I wore different clothes and could not go to birthday parties because there was simply no money to buy a present. When school organised an excursion, I often stayed at home. As a young girl, it seemed like life was all about the constant struggle to make ends meet. The social skills...were not available to me at the time."

— EAPN Belgium

Roma

EAPN Slovenia reports that Roma communities are the most excluded and deprived groups of the population and have no chance to exit the poverty cycle/trap. EAPN Spain highlighted the discrimination that Roma people face in the minimum income allowance, as in 2020 only 1 out of every 10 Roma applicants were granted minimum income, coupled with the fact that 7.5% of the applications were denied and the rest were pending resolution. EAPN Spain explained how the provision of the required documentation is sometimes complicated by time limits and/or overly bureaucratic and unwieldy procedures. Issues such as census registration, accreditation of the composition of the family unit, not having residence documents in order, can be complex for extended Roma families. Additionally, Roma people often lack the digital skills and information to know how to apply for minimum income online. Furthermore, EAPN Ireland emphasised that Irish Travellers are the least likely to have paid work: 17% of Traveller women and 13% of Traveller men have paid jobs compared to 68% of Irish women and 80% of men generally.

Youth


EAPN Slovakia reported the discrimination faced by young people in their labour market: as there are no salaries for individuals with no job experience, even if they have higher education. This severely impacts their financial independence as they do not have the means to have their own accommodation, let alone to start a family.

Furthermore, EAPN Norway found that young people dropping out of high school are also a group at increased risk of experiencing poverty. 1 in 5 who start high school dropout or do not complete their education within five years. The figures are even higher for vocational students. As a consequence, they are at a higher risk of unemployment and low income than other young people of their age.

Elderly

EAPN Lithuania also highlighted the higher number of female pensioners, as well as the fact that women's social security old-age pensions are significantly lower than men's. According to the Lithuanian Statistics Department, the AROPE for men aged 65+ was 24.3% in 2021, while for women it was 42%. EAPN Cyprus also found that in this age group, women are at greater risk of poverty, both before and after social benefits, in contrast with men of the same age group.

As highlighted by [ILGA Europe](#), older LGBTI people are at a high risk of social isolation due to smaller family networks. In some cases, they lost their family networks after coming out. On top of this, many LGBTI people either did not desire children or were unable to have children, so might not have the same social connections and support as other older people. Additionally, a major source of insecurity, both in terms of socioeconomic exclusion and social protection, for older LGBTI people, is the lack of legal and social recognition of same-sex relationships or one's legal gender. This can have



a number of impacts including the denial of family-derived rights such as: property inheritance; insurance; childcare responsibility; next of kin; tax inequality; lower or denied entitlement to pensions.

For instance, trans people may face a number of additional barriers in accessing existing pension entitlements after undergoing legal gender recognition, particularly if at a late stage in their career, due to non-recognition of pension contributions or years spent working under their former name; or even accessing pensions if they were forced to work informally due to severe social and labour market discrimination during their working years (the case for many older trans people).

Unemployed

According to our members, unemployed people are the most affected group at AROPE in Germany (78.2%), Austria (52%), Lithuania (50.4%), Croatia (46.6%), and Belgium (37.7%). In Portugal, women remain one of the most vulnerable groups to unemployment (6.3%) when compared to men (5.9%). In the first quarter of 2022, 21.3% of unemployed people in Portugal were young people aged 16-24.

Towards an Integrated and Ambitious EU Anti-Poverty Strategy

Promising Examples around Europe

EAPN would like to highlight some positive practices highlighted by our members that could be looked at by other countries. Although this list is not exhaustive, we would like to highlight the following examples:

- EAPN Belgium found that poverty rates did not increase dramatically in the aftermath of the pandemic because the Belgian social security system worked well during the crisis to protect people from falling into poverty. Additionally, the gaps in the social security system were partly covered by social measures taken by the Belgian government.
- In Bulgaria, there is a waiver of fees for state kindergartens and nurseries. The government has also temporarily reduced VAT on bread and domestic heating.
- EAPN France stressed the de-coupling of the Disabled Adult Allowance from the spouse's income as of 2023, to help secure the financial independence of persons with disabilities.
- EAPN Germany emphasised the rise of the statutory minimum wage from €9.60 to €12. Even if the real increase in the minimum wage is significantly lower than the current high rate of inflation, it is still a step forward. The introduction of a "9-Euro-Ticket" for local public transport also meant a relief of mobility costs for those affected by poverty, despite the fact that the programme expired after three months in September 2022.
- EAPN Lithuania learned that the reduction in child poverty is mainly due to the increase in the Child Money and the Supplementary Benefit for Needy Families and the widening of the range of recipients. EAPN Lithuania also welcomed a number of public support programmes available to help people and households in energy poverty to install renewable energy sources.

- EAPN Norway found it very positive that the production of renewable energy is increasing.
- EAPN Portugal highlighted the social tariff and extraordinary support given to the most vulnerable families during the COVID 19 pandemic.
- In Slovenia, kindergarten is free for those who have two or more children.
- EAPN Spain found the expansion of services such as oral and dental care in the National Health System, and the approval of the first National Strategic Plan for the Reduction of Childhood Obesity, to be very positive.

Voices of People Experiencing Poverty: Expertise and Voices from the Ground

"The price of food is too expensive for people in precarious situations; people only eat 'cancer'"

— EAPN France

Ever since its debut, EAPN has been advocating for the meaningful and inclusive participation of people experiencing poverty in all stages of anti-poverty policies, including their design and implementation. In EAPN's


view, any process towards eradicating poverty that does not centre on people experiencing poverty remains deficient and risks being unsuccessful. Meaningful participation requires holistic and effective actions that amplify the experiences of people experiencing poverty, puts them at the centre of anti-poverty work and tackles the root causes of poverty. Addressing the barriers to their participation is fundamental and EAPN wants policymakers to move from the typical tokenistic references to people experiencing poverty as objects of policies to people experiencing poverty as full subjects, resilient experts and powerful agents of change.

Given this, this section of the Poverty Watch highlights some of their own demands and recommendations for a more equal and social society, free of poverty and exclusion:⁸⁷

- Access to good quality and affordable water, energy, and transport services for the most vulnerable.
- All educational institutions must be barrier-free.
- All socio-cultural services must be free of charge for people experiencing poverty. This includes admission to museums and swimming pools, local public transport, public toilets, etc.
- Analog/face-to-face communication with the authorities must remain guaranteed. Information about social services and the support system must be made available and accessible in a transparent manner.
- Enactment of a unified framework for the provision of social housing.
- EU and state budgets must ensure safe funding to create and strengthen communities, led and driven by people experiencing poverty to represent their interests and amplify their voices, including in social protection schemes.
- Every community must have a public library, accessible and free of charge.
- Educational opportunities in rural areas must be expanded.

⁸⁷ This list of demands by people experiencing poverty is extracted from the 24 Poverty Watch Reports.

- Free, public, accessible, prompt healthcare, including treatment, testing, examination, medicine and travel costs.
- Make energy and housing costs affordable for people in poverty and on low incomes, in both the short and long-term.
- Make provisions if it is proven that no suitable housing can be found, so that it is then possible to remain in the dwelling or that suitable housing is made available.
- Mitigate energy poverty taking into consideration the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable.
- Promote private construction projects with the proviso that affordable housing is created.
- Reduce VAT on food, utility payments, healthcare services.
- School materials/teaching aids must be free of charge.
- Social benefits must be bundled and reflect the recipient's real needs, which must include daily living expenses, rent, holistic healthcare (that includes dental, opticians, chronic disease including addiction and mental health), children's education, culture and leisure. They must have wider eligibility criteria, last longer and be regularly indexed with the cost of living.
- The creation of social service centers or social hubs to facilitate the access of supporting applicants in accessing social benefits or essential services.
- Transport fare evasion must not be criminalised.
- Wages that are adequate to enable workers to live with dignity.



"As a person with a visual impairment and using a mobility cane to get around safely, I feel like I don't fit into the society that is out there. I am often socially excluded from a lot of things because I need help or guidance to get around a building or area. I feel it is safer for my mental health to stay at home and not attend events as then I don't have to explain myself. I have found that since we have come out of Covid that people with disabilities are being ignored in society and that able body people are rude to them and don't understand what we are going through. It is not everyone but there are a lot of people out there who think that we are faking our disability just to live off the state and get the payment, but they don't know what skills we have that we could contribute to society or work if we are given the chance".

— EAPN Ireland

Recommendations for Making our Societies Poverty-Free and Resilient to Future Crises

EAPN urges the EU and national governments to adopt an integrated, comprehensive and structural anti-poverty strategy that tackles the systemic root causes of poverty to make Europe more resilient to future crises. To achieve a socially just, sustainable, democratic and inclusive society, Europe must:

1

Ensure meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty, including vulnerable groups, in the policy design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of this anti-poverty strategy and any policies/legislation that will affect them. People experiencing poverty have direct knowledge and expertise of its impact on their daily lives and the gaps that need to be filled in the current policies for a decent life.



2

Provide a safe space for civil society organisations and human rights and social rights defenders to participate in civil dialogue and in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of anti-poverty policies/strategies at both European and national level. Member States should refrain from demonisation and repression of civil society organisations and instead secure a meaningful structured social dialogue in the respect of the rule of law.

3

Reform the EU's current fiscal framework to ensure that it reduces inequalities, through: ⁸⁸

- Prevention of austerity measures and budget cuts;
- Increase of public investment with a strong social lens;
- Promotion of tax justice, including through a progressive green tax system;
- Eradication of tax evasion and avoidance for a better distribution of income and wealth.

4

Increase investments for migrants' support and integration in Europe and tackle the double standards and systemic racism by:

⁸⁸ *Open letter: The EU's economic rules must allow for the necessary spending on people and climate.* (2022, October 17). Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.youthforum.org/files/Open-Letter-on-Fiscal-Reform-with-signatories.pdf

- Ensuring equal access to protection and safety for everyone who is affected by conflict, independent of their nationality, place of origin, race, ethnicity, religion and belief, or migration status.
- Providing access to social protection to all migrants, independently of the length of their residence status.
- Supplying all migrants, including those who are undocumented, with residence status.⁸⁹
- Refraining from requesting proof of subsistence means in the residency application.
- Stopping criminalisation of migration and assistance to migrants.

5

Tackle intersectional discrimination and exploitation against vulnerable groups, including women, racialised people, Roma people,⁹⁰ the LGBTI+ community, youth, elderly, migrants, sex workers, persons with disabilities, people living in homelessness, and children living in poor households, single-parent or one-working parent households.

- Implement, monitor and review through a coordinated approach EU equality action plans and instruments⁹¹ and ensure adequate funds and/or appropriate national budgets to meet the desired goals/targets.

⁸⁹ PICUM. (2021). Navigating Irregularity: The Impact of Growing Up Undocumented in Europe. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Navigating-Irregularity_EN.pdf

⁹⁰ “The umbrella term ‘Roma’ encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.).” from Roma equality, inclusion and participation in the EU. (2020, October 7). European Commission. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://commission.europa.eu/content/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu_en

⁹¹ These include but are not limited to: the Gender Equality Strategy, the Work-Life Balance Directive, the Directive on Equal Pay, the Anti-racism Action Plan, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee, the Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, the reinforced Youth Guarantee, and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

- 
- Prohibit discrimination on the grounds of nationality and socioeconomic status/disadvantage.⁹²

6

Tackling poverty includes understanding how it affects different people. Establishing mechanisms to collect data disaggregated by age, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, migration status, socioeconomic 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 policymaking.

7

Poverty and conflict are widely understood to be closely interconnected. A prosperous, social and equal Europe cannot be achieved when war and poverty occur on its doorstep and when money is shifted from social investments to military budgets. Eradication of poverty can only take place by de-escalating conflicts and seeking people-centered solutions for justice in conflict and war-affected countries.

⁹² Read more at Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2022). *Banning discrimination on grounds of socioeconomic disadvantage: an essential tool in the fight against poverty* (A/77/157). Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a77157-banning-discrimination-grounds-socioeconomic-disadvantage

8

The European Semester is a fiscal and economic mechanism which currently has a limited capacity to monitor the implementation of EPSR principles and initiatives from a rights-based perspective. The EU economic governance framework must be reframed and a proper mechanism implemented/upgraded with a stronger social dimension.

EAPN sees social protection as a basic right, throughout the lifespan, irrespective of the employment situation and underpinned by re-distributive tax funding rather than employment contributions only.

Guarantee the right to a decent income for all, in all stages of life:

9

Ensure that everyone has equal access to adequate social protection benefits, without discrimination, regardless of legal status, gender identity, employment status, contractual arrangements, race, ethnicity, or other characteristics.

10

Social protection benefits must match inflation and the cost of living through automatic indexation and benchmarking of reference budgets of goods and services.

11

Refrain from having conditionality clauses in social protection schemes.

12

Adopt a binding EU Framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income.⁹³

13

Implement strong policies to overcome non-take-up that tackle stigmatisation, lack of information and administrative barriers.⁹⁴ This can be done by:

- bundling social benefits,
- providing case-by-case management,
- providing targeted information,
- creating partnerships with civil society organisations/service providers, and
- through automatic application to those who need it, taking into account the information available on social security/national registries.

14

Ensure adequate wages, indexed every year, and redistribution of added value to all workers regardless of their gender, race, legal status, or other characteristics.⁹⁵

⁹³ *Joint statement on the European Commission's Proposal for a Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income schemes in the EU.* Retrieved December 22, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/eu-joint-statement-minimum-income/

⁹⁴ "The participation of people in poverty in the design, implementation and monitoring of social protection schemes would ensure that the obstacles they face to taking up social protection are adequately identified and addressed. Respondents to the worldwide survey insisted that engagement with people experiencing poverty was one of the most promising ways for reducing non-take-up. When moving from rights on paper to rights in practice, the world cannot afford the luxury of ignoring the experiential knowledge of people in poverty." from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2022). *Non-take-up of rights in the context of social protection* (A/HRC/50/38). Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5038-non-take-rights-context-social-protection-report-special

⁹⁵ For detailed recommendations on wages, please check item: EAPN. (2021, February 25). EC Proposal for EU Directive on Minimum Wages. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://www.eapn.eu/the-eu-must-adopt-a-directive-on-minimum-wages-eapn-statement/>

- States must refrain from having variations for specific groups (e.g. for long-term unemployed or persons with disabilities); sub-minimum rates (e.g. for young workers) or deductions for costs (e.g. for protective equipment) should be applied. Existing lower rates for young workers should be phased out and ultimately abolished (based on a binding time plan).
- Adequacy of wages must be assessed by using specific baskets of goods and services which must also account for work-related expenditure (e.g. transport, clothing, food, care responsibilities).

15

Close the gender poverty gap, including pay, care and pension gaps, through a comprehensive intersectional lens to address inter-generational transmission of poverty. Efforts to close the gaps should include an annual assessment that is disaggregated by gender and other demographic characteristics, including race, ethnicity, disability, nationality, legal status, age, sexual orientation, religion and belief.

As highlighted by Alynna Smith, Deputy Director at PICUM, during our launch event, there is currently very limited data on the income of undocumented households and the risk, or level, of poverty they face.

Guarantee the right to quality, accessible and affordable essential services through a rights-based approach:⁹⁶

To achieve this, it is important that this is given priority in the European Semester and that adequate funds are allocated, including outreach and specific funds to ensure access for vulnerable groups and people in remote/rural areas

As highlighted by Katrin Hugendubel, Advocacy Director at ILGA Europe, at our launch event, the lack of legal gender recognition procedures in place in many Member States has meant that trans and intersex people often cannot access support services, as the gender marker on their ID cards does not match their gender identity/expression (which gender they are perceived as), which exposes them to discrimination and violence. This predicament is also particularly challenging for LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees, who may have irregular identification documents. ILGA stresses the importance of producing guidelines to Member States to ensure that their social protection programmes reach LGBTI people, who are a particularly vulnerable group, and that assistance is provided in a non-discriminatory manner.

16

Ensure the right to free/affordable, universal and quality healthcare that covers all essential health and care services, including prevention, primary, community, mental, hospital and specialist care, dental, and the cost of medicines.

⁹⁶ EAPN understands essential services as services of general interest of economic and social nature, which are essential to the lives of the population and where the public authorities must ensure adequate standards for all. Therefore, essential services cover a broad range of activities linked to private providers, such as energy, telecommunications and transport services, but also include vital services which lie at the heart of EU social protection systems such as education, health, housing and social services.

- Create the framework for an accessible and affordable mental health-care system for all.⁹⁷
- Integrate the newly launched European Care Strategy through a rights-based approach for affordable high-quality early and long-term care for all.⁹⁸
- Ensure free access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, including through the provision of free birth control and menstrual health products, to those who want/need it.
- Provide a comprehensive paid parental leave plan.

17 Support the right to universal, quality, inclusive, accessible and affordable public education, early childhood education and care, vocational training and lifelong learning to all.

- Special attention and funds must be allocated to close the education gap among people experiencing poverty, particularly vulnerable groups as well as to ending discrimination, segregation and ban of religious symbols to ensure nobody is left behind.⁹⁹

18 Guarantee the right to affordable, inclusive and quality housing for all:

⁹⁷ For more recommendations, please check Mental Health Europe. (2022, November 1). *Statement on the new mental health initiative by the European Parliament Coalition on Mental Health and Wellbeing*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.mhe-sme.org/statement-on-the-new-mental-health-initiative-by-the-european-parliament-coalition-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/

⁹⁸ For more recommendations: EAPN. (2022, November 7). *No Backdoor on the Right to Care*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/no-backdoor-on-the-right-to-care/

⁹⁹ For more detailed recommendations on education: EAPN. (2020, April 10). *Ensuring Education, Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.eapn.eu/leaving-nobody-behind-ensuring-education-vocational-training-and-lifelong-learning-contributes-to-the-prevention-and-reduction-of-poverty-and-social-exclusion-eapn-key-issues-and-promising-pract/

- Regulate housing markets through rent caps and renoviction bans;¹⁰⁰
 - Raise housing allowances that reflect real costs to vulnerable groups;
 - Ban evictions and long-term foreclosures;
 - Prohibit housing discrimination; and
 - Increase the investment and supply of social, energy-efficient and affordable housing;
- As highlighted by our member FEANTSA, “the EU should encourage earmarking funds to refurbish social housing and convert long-term unused and vacant housing stock for use by social housing providers.”¹⁰¹

19 Address social and territorial exclusion, including through creating green, affordable and accessible public transport frameworks in rural/remote areas.

20 Guarantee energy as a public good and an essential service, whose price and availability is controlled by democratic and public governance. The right to affordable and clean energy for all must be guaranteed through a mix of emergency and structural measures, including:

¹⁰⁰ For more information, check FEANTSA. (2022). *Renovictions in Europe*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/reports/2022/2_Briefing_-_Renovictions_in_Europe.pdf

¹⁰¹ For more information, check FEANTSA. (2021). *How to avoid a Renoviction Wave*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/reports/2022/1_How_to_avoid_a_Renoviction_wave.pdf

- Banning all disconnections and providing progressive energy subsidies based on the levels of income and per person (not per household).
- Making energy efficiency vouchers accessible to all and setting out ad hoc support for those who cannot access information or are digitally poor.¹⁰²
- Gradually putting an end to fossil fuel subsidies and providing incentives for facilitating access to renewables.
- Establishing stable and measurable redistributive mechanisms such as revenue recycling from carbon pricing as well as windfall taxes – particularly for fossil fuel companies, and a cap on revenues of gas and electricity companies.
- Providing low-income households and tenants living in energy-inefficient houses with tailored renovation schemes in the residential sector.
- Establishing a decent housing standard in the EU, which includes affordability of housing, ambitious minimum energy performance standards and socially-just heating and cooling decarbonisation plans.
- Ensuring fair energy pricing and cleaning the energy market through the revision of the generation, distribution, and pricing mechanism in the upcoming reform of the electricity market.
- Carrying out a systematic distributional impact assessment of all energy and climate proposals to ensure that those least responsible for high energy prices and climate change do not pay the highest prices – particular focus should be paid to mitigating the regressive impact of green taxes.

102 Defined by EAPN as the inability to interact correctly with digital tools and spaces, due to the lack of skills, resources or internet connection.

21

Tackle food poverty and food insecurity, including by:

- Creating a sustainable food production and distribution system and
- Providing healthy meals to vulnerable groups, including in social houses and schools.¹⁰³

22

Tackle the digital divide through dedicated investments to address the digital gap and increase digital literacy. The provision of analogue/face-to-face answers to those unable to access online services should be maintained.¹⁰⁴

23

Increase support to people experiencing poverty and vulnerable groups, including by providing them with free financial and debt counselling/education as well as social lending. In some cases, debt relief for vulnerable families should be provided.

¹⁰³ For more recommendations, please check EAPN France. (2022, July). *Special European Seminar on Food Insecurity*. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from <https://eapn.fr/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/eapn-france-Seminaire-du-1er-juin-Synthese-et-Propositions-dEAPN-France.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ For more recommendations, please check the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2022). *The right to privacy in the digital age*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F51%2F17&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

PICUM's recommendations emphasised by Alyna Smith during our launch event:

24

Protect working parents from exploitation, including low pay, by addressing gaps in labour law coverage and making explicit the social inclusion of all workers, regardless of status.

25

Ensure migrant workers have access to contribution-based social protection into which they have paid.

26

Implement international standards on social security rights for undocumented workers in national law and practice.

27

Include undocumented people when expanding social protection coverage.

28

Reform residence and migration policies that perpetuate poverty and social exclusion, including immigration detention, family separation, forced homelessness, malnutrition, and social isolation.




29

Reform labour migration pathways.

30

Regularise labour and social rights of existing undocumented workers.¹⁰⁵

105 PICUM. (2021). Navigating Irregularity: The Impact of Growing Up Undocumented in Europe. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Navigating-Irregularity_EN.pdf .



Information & Contact



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.

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For more information on EAPN general publications and activities, see www.eapn.eu

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