

20th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty

MEETING REPORT



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

The UNBEARABLE Cost of Living



PeP

EUROPEAN MEETINGS OF
PEOPLE
EXPERIENCING
POVERTY

LISTEN TO THE EXPERTS OF POVERTY, EXCLUSION AND INEQUALITIES

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organised by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty (PeP) contribute to the right of people living in poverty to participate in and access information relating to the decision-making processes that affect their lives and well-being.

The 20th edition of the Meeting (PeP 2022) took place from 29th to 30th November 2022 in Brussels, Belgium under the title '*The unbearable cost of living*' and brought together 175+ participants, including national delegations of people experiencing poverty from 30 countries, policymakers, and representatives of European non-governmental organisations working towards eliminating poverty.

With a combination of plenary sessions and interactive workshops, the event was the last step in a one year long participatory process where EAPN members had the opportunity to speak up and present their political priorities in three key areas:

- Cost of Energy
- Cost of Food
- Cost of Housing

The opening plenary set the scene for later discussions, with moving testimonies from Irish Spanish, and Lithuanian national delegates, followed by responses from politicians and policymakers.

The day continued with three rounds of workshops based on the World Café methodology¹ where participants – national delegations of people experiencing poverty, policymakers, and representatives of European NGOs – discussed the three themes that were the focus of the meeting in more depth. The aim of the workshops was to draft key demands and messages that would be then presented the following day by representatives of each workshop.



¹ For more information on this method: www.theworldcafe.com





At the end of the first day, delegations took part in an energizing Visibility Action. Visibility Action moments have become a tradition of PEP Meetings: their main aim is to amplify the voices of people experiencing poverty attending the PEP Meeting, connecting with a wider audience and raising awareness about poverty and social exclusion in Europe.

The delegations walked around Brussels city centre and distributed holiday cards and messages linked to the topics of the Meeting. The cards were prepared by each national delegation in advance of the meeting.

The focus of the second day was the closing plenary where the key demands developed previously during the workshops were presented to high-level policymakers and politicians. Their responses to the demands presented stirred some further debate with the audience.

This report summarizes the main points and challenges that were highlighted during the PeP 2022 by the different speakers and participants.





II. OPENING PLENARY OF THE PEP MEETING

The opening plenary was facilitated by **EAPN Director Juliana Wahlgren**, who highlighted the intention of the session to set the scene for the following two days; strengthening the voices of people experiencing poverty and ensuring that they are heard by decision makers.

The first speaker was **EAPN Vice-President Eleni Karaoli**. She noted that the meeting came at a crucial time, as the turmoil facing Europe had worsened already existing social injustices and contributed to an unbearably high cost of living. In times of such crisis, the poverty line is very thin and easy to cross. The audience was reminded that people experiencing poverty were there to share their experiences and that EAPN continues to strive to place PeP at the center of the EU policy agenda. In this spirit, the audience was introduced to three people experiencing poverty who shared their moving testimonies.

Lesley O'Reilly from EAPN Ireland told the audience about her experiences of poverty. She explained that she was a teen mother who had grown up in a broken home surrounded by addiction. She became dependent on social welfare payments but didn't want her children to face the same stigma she did.

After returning to education, she became a community worker and now works to empower women and people experiencing poverty. Lesley highlighted that the system is designed to keep people down and that the cost of living crisis is further aggravating the situation. She argued that the government isn't addressing the core problems driving poverty and highlighted the need to reach achievable goals to avoid increased poverty rates. It is when we are together that we can bring about change, Lesley said.



Mari Carmen Gómez Pérez is an activist and person affected by energy poverty since 2016. She shared that due to socioeconomic challenges, she was unable to pay two bills to Gas Natural, one of the biggest companies in the Spanish energy oligopoly. This company eventually cut off her energy supply. Mari Carmen began to participate in the Alliance against Energy Poverty, which fights for the rights of people affected by energy poverty. She highlighted that the struggle is not just about health, but also about the dignity that every person should be guaranteed. The alliance hosts regular assemblies where they assess the issue of energy poverty and listen to people affected by it. Mari Carmen highlighted that energy companies threaten families by sending letters of judicial processes, which can be highly intimidating. The alliance gives people tools to impede these processes and raises awareness of the legal protections available. Mari Carmen expressed the importance of standing by our voice, making noise, and making ourselves heard.



Next to take the floor was **Eligija Snaikstaite**. She is a student from Lithuania who shared her experience of growing up in poverty. Her father is a low-paid worker and a lack of money created a lot of stress in her family. She was stigmatised in school and constant stress took a toll on her grades. At 17, while she was still in education, she had a baby. She had no source of income and was dependent on her father to support herself and her child. Eligija shared that she is now studying and hopes to have a job where she can help other people.

However, as she is still a student she does not earn a minimum wage and the costs of house maintenance and energy are high. She shares her story because she hopes that by speaking up she can improve the situation for others in the future.

Next in the opening plenary, policy makers reflected on the testimonies that had been given. First up was **Katarina Ivanković-Knežević**, the **Director for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission**. She expressed that hearing the stories shared at the session urged her to do more and do better. She went on to highlight the crises of war and energy that have impacted Europe since the pandemic and how the Commission sets targets at the European and national level to help tackle these crises. In particular, she pointed to the minimum



wage directive as a support for those experiencing in-work poverty and the child guarantee as a means to prevent poverty through access to education and a healthy meal. She also spoke of the commission proposal for a council recommendation on minimum income and its focus on adequacy, active inclusion and access to essential services. Despite the recognised challenges, Katarina said the Commission is making progress to improve people's lives.

Marie Toussaint, MEP in the Green/EFA group, spoke next. Reflecting on the testimonies given, she highlighted that while poverty is often understood in simple monetary terms, there is more to the issue. She applauded the courage shown by the speakers and recognised that people experiencing poverty are those with the answers. Although we have the means to eradicate poverty, she said, those in power are unwilling to do so. This leads to a situation where vulnerable people must fight for their rights. She also highlighted the intersection of social justice and environmental issues and the need for people experiencing poverty to be included in designing green policies.

The last speaker of the opening plenary was **Milagros Paniagua**, from the **General Secretariat of Social Inclusion in the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration**. She recognised that vulnerability has different dimensions and highlighted measures implemented by the Spanish government such as energy allowances, inclusion policies and minimum income schemes. Despite the efforts mentioned, Milagros identified non-take up of minimum income as a key issue, which she said often arises from a lack of transparency and absence of information. She closed by saying that the Spanish Presidency would focus on activation measures and proactivity in reaching out to those in need.

To close the opening plenary, there was a **Q&A session with the audience**:

The first question was directed to Milagros Paniagua, who was asked about the priorities of the Spanish Presidency regarding social exclusion and poverty. She replied that follow up to the Council Recommendation on minimum income would be an important area.

Next, Marie Toussaint was asked about how we can ensure MEPs prioritise the issue of poverty. She argued that poverty has never really been high on the agenda and that the principle of "leave no one behind" remains a slogan and not a commitment. She highlighted the low attendance of MEPs at the parliamentary debate on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. She argued that for the next elections people need to be organised and fight for poverty to be taken seriously, as people did for climate in the 2019 elections.

Katarina Ivanković-Knežević was then asked about the Commission's role in tackling stigmatization and digital poverty. She highlighted that stigmatisation needs to be addressed as a mainstreaming principle and that cooperation with civil society organisations is essential in this regard. She shared that civil society has played a fundamental role in information sharing at the national level within the context of the EU platform to combat homelessness.



With regard to digital poverty, Katarina said that this is closely linked to digital literacy, which became very visible during the pandemic. Digital poverty had particularly detrimental impacts for education. She said that this issue must be taken into account when assessing access to all essential services.



III. KEY CHALLENGES AND DEMANDS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

During the next part of the day, participants joined workshops focusing on different aspects of the cost of living crisis. The purpose of these interactive workshops was for PeP delegates to exchange ideas and discuss the most pressing issues identified during national preparations. There were seven workshops covering three different topics; two on food poverty, two on housing and three on energy poverty. In the first round of workshops, delegates shared their personal experiences on one of the topics and highlighted their most pressing concerns. Delegates then moved to a second workshop on a new topic where they added to what had been said in the previous round and identified issues that may not have already been discussed. In the third round, delegates returned to the workshop they attended in round one to formulate key messages to be presented to policy makers the next day. With this participative approach, each delegation was able to contribute to the discussions on two different issues.

Summary of challenges and key messages from workshops

ENERGY POVERTY

Challenges

In all three workshops, participants identified the treatment of energy as a commodity, rather than a human right, as a driving factor of energy poverty. The instability of the market, price volatility, combined with precarious income streams, mean that people do not have reliable and stable access to this essential service. As put by one participant with experience of poverty from Italy, “Energy should not be a luxury. It is a necessity just as bread and water.” It was highlighted that the access to energy conditions access to other rights. Without affordable electricity, people’s access to food and health is jeopardized. Moreover, other forms of energy such as motor fuels are also rising in price. Fuel costs may limit mobility, especially where there is an absence of public transport. People may struggle to access work, education and essential services if they cannot afford to travel. Despite the interconnectedness of these issues, multiple participants argued that government ministries were failing to co-operate and reach comprehensive solutions.

One of the three workshops took a very strong stance on the dangers of energy poverty all year around. Despite the misconception that energy prices are only a concern during the winter, in certain areas the issue is even more pressing during the summer. As one person from Catalunya shared, “at 10 in the morning it was 35 degrees in my house and I had to leave.”

Another participant added, “it’s not a question of more or less comfort, but of life and death... people are dying of heat stroke.” Energy poverty also has a diverse range of impacts that are not



limited to any particular weather; it affects people's ability to light their homes, cook for themselves, do their laundry, and use technology. Participants in this workshop strongly felt that the issue of energy poverty needs to be prioritised regardless of the season.

“It's not a question of more or less comfort, but of life and death... people are dying of heat stroke.”

Participant in one of the workshops on energy poverty

Unmanageable Costs

Across all three workshops people experiencing poverty agreed that the stagnation of wages and benefits in comparison to prices is at the heart of the energy crisis. For some, energy cost are multiple times what they were before the crisis, while raises in income have been negligible. This situation leads to a reduction in real income, causing many who were barely managing to get by before, to cross the line into poverty. Many participants expressed the view that the middle class is being eroded by the rise in costs.

Meanwhile, those already experiencing poverty have been plunged into even greater hardship and are shouldering the worst of the crisis. This is exacerbated by the fact that people experiencing poverty often live in accommodation with poor insulation, meaning they must use more energy to meet their needs. Describing the toll taken by this crisis, a person with experience of poverty from Italy said “I am falling in slavery, I am working only to survive, just to pay bills”. Another participant with direct experience of energy poverty shared “I am cold, I am hungry because I cannot pay my bills”.

The rise in costs has meant that in many places it is simply no longer possible to live on a pension, social welfare or a minimum wage salary. One woman experiencing poverty from Spain shared that her disability allowances is no longer enough to cover her energy bills. Participants from all workshops shared that new supports introduced by their government to combat the crisis were not sufficient and not available to all who needed them.

For instance, a person experiencing poverty in France shared that although his energy has been cut three times since the beginning of the crisis, he was told he was not eligible for an energy voucher. It was also pointed out that while the pension was increased in France, the raise did not match the increases in costs. In Germany there has been a plan to increase benefits in response to the rising cost of living, however this has still not been implemented and people relying on welfare are faced with continued uncertainty regarding the payment. A person with experience of poverty from Lithuania also shared that supports from the state required an official rental



contract, but that many tenants rent without a legal contract due to the preferences of the landlord. Meanwhile in Italy, people reported that the supports offered during the crisis were targeted towards businesses and not citizens.

Due to inadequate support from the state, people experiencing poverty from all three workshops were forced to deploy personal strategies to deal with the crisis. People reported not lighting their homes at night, wearing more clothes and blankets to keep warm, not ironing their clothes, watching less TV, unplugging large appliances, switching to public laundrettes and charging their phones with a small solar panel. Christalia from Cyprus shared that many pensioners spend time in shopping centres as a way to leave their home and avoid central heating costs. In some cases people took long term risks, such as not paying their health insurance, in order to get by. Across workshops it was felt that people should not be left alone in fighting energy poverty and that the reliance on these kinds of strategies reflects a systemic failure.

Disconnections

The increasing gap between incomes and living costs, combined with personal circumstances, has meant that many people experiencing poverty have been unable to pay their energy bills. People in this situation have found themselves subject to disconnections, sometimes after only the second month of non-payment. A person experiencing poverty from Greece shared her experience:

“I couldn’t pay energy bills last year because my father has Alzheimer’s and my mom got ill so I needed to pay doctors. The energy company disconnected me without notice.”

Participant from Greece in one of the workshops on energy poverty

In some cases, energy supplies are available to those who have been cut off, however these emergency provisions are extremely expensive. Disconnections ultimately threaten the health, wellbeing and dignity of people experiencing energy poverty. In Catalunya, a law was passed in 2015, which banned disconnections. However, those who were unable to pay energy bills continued to be faced with large debts and energy companies continue to harass these households. In some cases, a special report is required to prevent disconnections, however this



process is not accessible to those without digital literacy and many people experiencing poverty cannot access it.

Business Interests

While reflecting on the adversity caused by increasing costs, people experiencing poverty in every workshop noted that businesses are profiting from these price increases. Energy markets tend to be dominated by a few large companies who hold significant power and whose interests are often not aligned with those of citizens. In many cases, a free-market approach means that states do not sufficiently regulate corporate activity, particularly increases in prices and profits. It was broadly felt that the failure of states to intervene in energy markets is increasing precarity for people experiencing poverty. Some people also argued that when states do intervene, energy companies find ways of avoiding the limitations placed on them. For instance, when social tariffs are put in place, energy companies may find means of avoiding them and any challenge to this can take months to resolve. A lack of transparency from energy companies was also noted. Maria-Luisa from the Alliance against Energy Poverty argued that “they misinform people, creating confusion and you have to know what to ask for.” Overall, there was a feeling that governments are catering to large companies and that people experiencing poverty are paying the costs. “We should tell them to stand beside the people and not companies,” said one participant.

Shame and Stigma

Another hardship endured by people experiencing energy poverty is the shame and stigma associated with the problem. Two of the three workshops on energy poverty mentioned stigma and reflected on its mental health consequences. It was felt that individual responsibility was being pushed as a solution to the crisis, placing the burden on people experiencing poverty to reduce their usage even when it means not meeting their basic needs. People who are affected by energy poverty are often made to feel personal guilt for the suffering caused by systemic failure. A person experiencing poverty from Spain shared that their mother did not have the means to pay for both food and energy. She felt ashamed when she was disconnected and was unable to talk to friends or family about this. It was also highlighted that children affected by energy poverty experience bullying in schools because of their situation. Participants agreed there needs to be a change in attitude and that companies and states need to take responsibility for the crisis of energy poverty.

How to improve the situation

Across workshops, participants felt that concrete political will was the key to addressing energy poverty. One person with experience of poverty from France expressed frustration at having to repeat the same things and talk about the same issues without seeing real change. It was highlighted that there is enough energy for everyone to meet their needs, but only insofar as



energy is shared equitably. While many steps can and should be taken to improve the current crisis, it was felt that in the long term we need a shift towards an economic model that treats access to sustainable energy as a human right. Responsibility for this process should be taken by politicians, both at national and EU level, however citizens should also have their voices heard. In particular, people experiencing poverty should be empowered to shape the policies that impact their rights. Participation is especially important in the move to greener energy systems. Finally, many participants felt that the issue of energy poverty cannot be addressed in isolation and secure access to *all* necessities must be achieved.

A Targeted Approach

Many people experiencing poverty felt that a targeted approach was needed to address the crisis of energy poverty. It was noticed that some universal supports did not reach the most vulnerable and thus only served to increase inequality. A person with experience of poverty from Cyprus highlighted that digitalisation and a failure to provide information in an accessible format means that many people are left behind when it comes to energy supports. There was a sense that governments need to adequately target and support at-risk groups, including people experiencing poverty. Assistance should not only be financial, but include accessible information and psychosocial supports where needed. It was argued that to support those struggling with fuel poverty directly, states should exempt cases of energy debt from legal proceedings and provide the help of a social worker to those affected. More broadly, the effects of the energy crisis on people experiencing poverty can be addressed by ensuring that wages, welfare benefits and pensions are revised upwards in line with the cost of living.

Clean Energy and Social Justice

The necessity of sustainable energy systems was discussed in all three workshops. It was widely felt that addressing the energy crisis in the immediate term needs to be balanced with a long-term shift to green energy. However, it was noted that some policies carried out in the name of sustainability may negatively impact people experiencing poverty and further heighten inequality. For instance, a regressive carbon tax may make energy more inaccessible to people experiencing poverty, especially where green energy sources remain expensive. As one participant pointed out, many of those using unsustainable energy simply cannot afford to switch. An approach to climate policy that places the burden on individuals to change their behavior will ultimately stigmatize those who do not have the resources to do so.

Instead, we need a just transition that prioritizes the most vulnerable and promotes equal access to sustainable energy. For this to be realized, people experiencing poverty must have a voice in the design of transition policies. Participants in the workshops identified several ways for states to tackle poverty while promoting sustainability. Firstly, renovations and upgrades to promote energy efficiency should target people experiencing poverty, prioritizing social houses and lower-cost rental accommodation. Moreover, strong regulatory standards regarding energy efficiency



should be implemented for these types of buildings. Another important point raised is that while governments are promoting solar panels, the programmes offered include large upfront costs and are entirely out of reach for people experiencing poverty. Measures should be taken to ensure that solar power is accessible to all, including those who cannot contribute to the costs or do not own their own homes. Participants with experience of poverty also felt that transition policies should distinguish between essential and luxury energy use. Energy for heating one's home or driving to work should not face the same restrictions as energy used for private jets.

Market Intervention

It was strongly felt throughout all workshops that energy, as an essential public service, cannot be left to markets alone. During these times of crisis, and in the long run, governments must intervene in the market and limit the capacity of large corporations to profit at the expense of citizens. Most pressingly, there was consensus among all three groups that a price cap is needed to secure access to energy for all. As outlined above, unfettered price increases are damaging to the health and dignity of the most vulnerable, while energy companies gain massive profits. In addition to price controls, excess profits in the energy sector must be redistributed through progressive taxation. Disconnections should be banned and people affected by energy poverty must be guaranteed continued access without debt accrual or harassment from corporations. Social tariffs can also be used to ensure accessibility; however, these schemes must be implemented effectively and available to all who need it. Energy communities were also highlighted as a solution, however it was noted that entry fees must be removed for those who cannot afford to pay. Lastly, participants felt that good practices of market intervention should be shared between Member States at an EU level.

Decommodification

While immediate intervention in the market is essential to tackle energy poverty, there was consensus across all workshops that there also needs to be a long-term transformation of the energy economy. Participants felt that energy, as a human right, should not be treated as a commodity and that we must move away from the profit-centered energy market towards a people-centered public system. As put by one participant “we need to resocialise the energy market”. It is important to note however, that public ownership of energy does not automatically correspond to fair distribution. For instance, participants from Austria highlighted that energy costs in the country remain high despite there being a public system. To comprehensively tackle energy poverty, the energy system must be accountable to the public. Citizens should understand that their rights are non-negotiable and be empowered to participate in decision making around energy production and distribution. In particular, the voices of people experiencing poverty must be prioritized.



Key Messages from Workshop 1

Fair transition to a new energy system

- Clean energy
- Climate justice
- Social justice
- Public control on energy price/provision (revenue recycling= redistribution of profits)
- Consumers' involvement in decision making
- Adequate standards/funding for insulation of social housing and rented houses

Multi-dimensional approach

- Define price ceilings
- VAT reduction on energy and periodic revision
- Targeted benefits and adequate amounts for risk groups
- No legal proceedings for energy debts and help from social workers
- Have committees including end users
- Decoupling electricity price from gas

High energy - low salary - health problems and violence in the home

- Targeted support for PeP with mental health issues
- Compensation mechanics based on the life experience and evidence
- Reduce inflation, indexation of pensions and other benefits
- Progressive tax systems (less on labour, more on extra profits)
- Redistribute income (annual minimum wage revision)



Key Messages from Workshop 2

Access to energy is a human right and not a commodity

- There is enough energy for all if we share it equitably
- We need affordable energy (social tariffs, debt cancellation)
- Solutions such as publicly funded renovation, actions from NRRP
- Stability

Political will must be the engine for change

- Public ownership
- Change from profit orientation to a right-based approach
- Energy communities
- Build alliances to ensure access to energy and other public goods.

Slogan: Energy poverty is not just a winter problem!

Key Messages from Workshop 3

Energy as a right. We are in a crisis.

Political will needed.

Short-term demands

- Guarantee supplies without debt
- Ban disconnections
- Funds, info, support for vulnerable households
- Capping the price

Long-term demands on transition

- Legislation on heating/cooling systems
- Change the market to more public-citizen co-creation of policies and ownership and governance (link with distinguishing between needs/luxury)
- Develop infrastructure to help the whole of Europe and diversify supply



Challenges

As is true for the cost of living crisis broadly, food poverty is driven by rising prices combined with inadequate income. Under these conditions, people experiencing poverty are too often left at the mercy of a volatile market, unable to meet their most basic needs. As expressed by one delegate from the Czech Republic,

“prices are increasing week after week... We are afraid of going back to the supermarket.”

Participant from the Czech Republic

It was pointed out that while many are enduring hunger and precarity, significant amounts of food are being wasted on a daily basis. This contradiction raises the question of how food production and distribution is organised and highlights the need to move away from dependence on international supply chains.

Soaring Prices

Participants from all workshops agreed that pensions, welfare schemes and wages are not keeping up with the exponential increases in food prices. For instance, in Bulgaria, pensions are only €250 a month and while there is a mechanism to revise the payment upwards in line with inflation, this has not been functional for the last two years. The hit to real income caused by the crisis means that many are unable to meet their needs. People cannot afford to buy enough food or to have variety in their diet. Prices have risen for even the most basic products, and many reported having to choose between food and other essentials such as bills or medication. In Romania, half of the population cannot afford to eat fish or meat other than chicken. A person with experience of poverty from Poland shared that people are eating scraps of meat that are usually saved for dogs, but that even these have risen dramatically in price.

With soaring costs, parents are struggling to ensure their children get proper nutrition and many children are going to school hungry. A single mother from Lithuania shared that she must bring a calculator to the grocery store to count every cent and that she gives her daughter just €1 a day to buy lunch. A woman from Austria shared that when her children were young she would give





them dinner while she went to sleep hungry, but said that if she was in the same position today she probably wouldn't be able to feed her children either.

Food Banks

Those struggling with food poverty are often forced to rely on food banks, however there are many problems associated with this. First and foremost, food banks are not always practically accessible to people experiencing poverty due to a lack of transportation and other logistical issues. Moreover, there are often long waiting lines, especially during

the current cost of living crisis. Some people reported that the quality of food provided has been deteriorating.

Another important issue is that people who rely on food banks have very little say in what food they eat. This is particularly challenging for those who have special dietary requirements such as people with allergies and people with disabilities. It may be difficult for people to explain their specific needs and the food they require may not always be available. Across both workshops, people with experience of poverty also highlighted that relying on food banks is highly stigmatizing and can have a negative impact on mental health. People should be empowered to choose and buy their own food instead of being forced to accept whatever is given to them in a package.

The Threat to Health

For many, the rising cost of food is having serious impacts on their physical and mental health. In both workshops participants noted that healthy and nutritious food is not affordable. Fast food, junk food and highly processed food is the most accessible, as these products have not risen in price as much as others. Many people, especially youth, are reliant on fast food as it is the only kind they can afford. There are major physical and psychological health impacts from eating this kind of food on a regular basis. Furthermore, people with dietary restrictions face additional costs and therefore face even greater barriers to accessing a healthy diet. In addition to problems caused directly by a lack of nutrition, the stress and stigma of food poverty has negative impacts on people's mental health. A person with experience of food poverty from Portugal shared that



their situation left them feeling despair and no optimism. Similarly, a participant from Poland said that they felt shame and worry due to the lack of affordable food.

Rising Profits

As is the case with energy, it is often suggested that the war in Ukraine is solely to blame for the rising cost of food. This narrative means that the role played by governments and businesses is sometimes overlooked. While noting the impact of supply issues, participants from both workshops see that increasing profits are a crucial factor in perpetuating food poverty. It was argued that large multinationals are being allowed to benefit from the crisis and that there is a lack of transparency regarding how companies set prices. A participant from Portugal highlighted that cereals are produced in Portugal, rather than imported from Ukraine, but prices are rising nonetheless. In this case it was felt that the responsibility lay with businesses seeking to increase profits. A person with experience of poverty from Italy expressed that so long as people are making money off of it, the crisis cannot be blamed on the pandemic or the war. As one participant put it,

“they are using excuses to increase prices and when the excuses go away, the prices don’t go down.”

Participant from Italy in one of the workshops on food poverty

Globalisation

The adversity caused by the cost-of-living crisis urged people to consider the broader question of how food is produced and distributed, who controls this process and who is disadvantaged by it. It was noted that globalisation of the food industry has led to reliance on multinational corporations and a lack of accountability in the supply chain. Local communities are stripped of their autonomy and people experiencing poverty are highly vulnerable to changes in the market. It was noted that in globalised supply chains, primary workers such as those in agriculture are not treated or paid fairly. The price paid at the store is far higher than the price given to producers, with large businesses capturing the difference as profit. The global market also creates situations where countries export the same products that they import, often disadvantaging the local economy. A participant shared that food goods produced in Croatia are sold at a cheaper price in Germany than they are at home. Similarly, someone from the Netherlands shared that people cannot afford to buy locally produced meat and so must opt for imported products instead. Lastly, it was felt that due to the complex chain between production and market, people have a lack of agency over the ingredients they consume. Pesticides, food coloring and preservatives are



commonplace while organic food is highly expensive. This further limits the capacity of people experiencing poverty to have control over their diet and meet their nutritional needs.

Solutions

As with other issues, it was noted that if there is a strong political will, measures can be implemented to meaningfully combat food poverty. Such action should not target food poverty in isolation, nor force people into dependency on barely adequate welfare. Multiple people with experience of poverty shared that they lost social supports if they worked, but that it was not possible to have a decent life through work alone. Food poverty should be tackled in a way that promotes the overall autonomy and dignity of PeP, including through access to both a well-paying job and adequate social benefits.

Highlighting the urgency of addressing food poverty, a participant from Estonia said,

“we can’t stop eating. We don’t have other choices. Therefore, we need to find solutions to have affordable prices for food.”

Participant from Estonia

Dignified access to food

Across both workshops it was argued that addressing food poverty means ensuring dignified access to healthy food. While tackling food waste is important, there should not be an expectation on people experiencing poverty to eat expiring food and other people’s leftovers. Additionally, there was a strong sentiment that people should have agency over what food they eat. As put by a participant from Germany “having a choice is always the best choice.” In one workshop it was suggested that food vouchers should be introduced as an alternative to food banks. This avoids logistical issues, is less stigmatising and ensures that people can meet their own dietary requirements. However, it is crucial that food vouchers are indexed and keep up with inflation, otherwise they risk being rendered unusable. Furthermore, some participants felt that increasing wages and benefits directly is the most effective way to ensure access to food. As expressed by one participant from Norway,



“I’d like to have my own money to buy the food that I want. This is the normal situation.”

Participant from Norway

It was also felt that direct provision of meals for children was an important measure to support families experiencing poverty. In Greece and Finland food is provided to children in their school, however this is not always sufficient and children still face hunger when they are not in school. States should guarantee access to three healthy meals a day for all children, including a hot meal. Lastly, people experiencing poverty noted that dignified access to food cannot be achieved without access to other essentials. People need a home in which to cook, clean running water and affordable energy.

Market Interventions

Participants from both workshops felt that direct state intervention was necessary to tackle food poverty. Businesses should not have unrestrained power to increase prices, especially during a cost-of-living crisis. People experiencing poverty felt there needed to be greater transparency surrounding how prices are set and that this should be investigated on an EU level. Crucially, price caps need to be placed on basic foods to guarantee they do not become inaccessible. In line with this, taxes should be reduced or removed for essential items. At the same time, people proposed that profits in the food industry should be redistributed through progressive taxation. Governments must also take steps to tackle the volatility of prices and stabilize the food market, including through increased regulation of businesses.

Local Solidarity

As well as tackling the current cost-of-living crisis, it is important to move towards more secure and equitable systems of food production and distribution. People should be empowered to have agency over the food they eat and how it is produced. Towards this aim, participants in both workshops believed that local solidarity was key. Promoting alternative agriculture and localising food supply would reduce the vulnerability of people experiencing poverty to changes in the international market. Moreover, these measures can help increase sustainability and improve the nutritional quality of food goods. Supporting seasonal and local production and encouraging the use of fruit trees and community gardens are important steps that can be taken by the state to aid this process. Educational campaigns on gardening, cooking, nutrition, food storage, composting and waste could also help promote solidarity and sufficiency within communities. To ensure that local food systems can meet the needs of people experiencing poverty, it is essential that they are meaningfully included in their design and day-to-day management.



Key Messages from Workshop 4

The model of 3S: Sustainability, Solidarity and Stability.

Sustainability

- Access to information and education to learn about sustainability

Solidarity

- Taxes and low profit: reducing taxes on food but also reducing the profits that can be made by those who benefit from the increasing price. Finding a balance between the different taxations. A solution could be to reduce the taxes on basic and elementary products and increase the taxes on luxury products
- Tax the high profits of multinationals benefiting from the crisis
- Decent minimum income: Secure a decent minimum income that will enable everyone to be able to buy their own food

Stability

- Fighting the volatility of prices. Markets need to be stabilised. Everything is connected. Food is not a problem on its own



Key Messages from Workshop 5

- Social benefits should include food security
 - Price limit for basic food
 - Dependence on global supply chains decreases the agency of local communities and has negative impacts on food security, food quality and labour rights
 - Support and protect local farmers/producers
 - Combat reckless food waste of companies and ensure that quality food is redistributed to people experiencing poverty in a dignified manner
 - 3 free healthy meals in school
 - Access to drinkable water for free
 - Encourage production of local food
 - Control the prices/ regulate market and prices/ transparency
 - Make social solidarity effective
 - Invest in sustainable policy measures
 - Set poverty as a priority and invest in participation
 - Increase incomes (social benefits and wages)
 - Minimum income that allows people to live in dignity
- Change the methodology for measuring poverty
 - Who's profiting from the prices? Make the governments and private companies accountable
 - Importance of culture and entertainment – link with the society
 - Provide a minimum subsistence (roof, sufficient income, energy, water)



Challenges

The lack of affordable housing throughout Europe has serious repercussions for people experiencing poverty. As homeownership is mostly inaccessible to this group, they are severely impacted by increasing rents and face lifelong insecurity in the rental market. The cost of renting eats up people's income, leaving little left for other needs such as food, energy, education or leisure. As one delegate shared,

“I cannot buy my daughter clothes or a toy because the rent is so high. The high cost of housing impacts everything else.”

Participant in one of the workshops on housing

At the same time, housing is usually a prerequisite for accessing other rights. It is difficult to cook food or access employment or education if you do not have a secure place to live.

People experiencing poverty also expressed their concern over the quality of both public and private accommodation. As there is a limited stock of affordable housing, people are often forced to accept undignified living conditions. This is worsened by the fact that people experiencing poverty may have little money to invest in repairs or maintenance. Additionally, high costs mean that people are forced to share small living spaces with multiple others. All of these factors can create tension within relationships and contribute to stress, anxiety and depression.

Furthermore, those who seek to cope with costs by living with others are often penalized by the social welfare system. A person with experience of poverty from Greece shared that when homeless people are able to find accommodation with friends or family, their social benefits become based on a household and everyone has their payments cut. Similarly, in Belgium when children live at home past the age of 18, this can reduce the social benefits received by their parents. Delegates shared that this destroys solidarity within families and puts an increased pressure on the housing market as people do not want to cohabitate.



Unrestrained Housing Costs

Participants in both workshops agreed that the rise in housing costs is far outpacing any rise in incomes. One woman with experience of poverty shared that her rent has been going up every

month without notice and in total has risen over 50% in four years. People pointed out that finding decent accommodation has become a struggle even for middle income people.

However, the greatest burden falls on people experiencing poverty, many of whom are now spending up to 70% of their income on housing. In many places there is no upper limit on rent and so landlords are free to ask for any amount of money. In cities in particular, rents have become entirely

unmanageable. Participants shared that a 10-meter room in Amsterdam is €1000 a month and that in Dublin a one-bedroom apartment costs almost €3000. One person with experience of poverty from Hungary highlighted that people who have lived in Budapest their whole lives can no longer afford to pay rent there. Housing tends to be cheaper outside of cities, however there is a lack of employment opportunities and limited access to essential services in rural areas.

Deposits on rental accommodation also present a major barrier for people experiencing poverty. For example, participants from Austria shared that the minimum deposit is three months' rent and that you also have to pay the first three months' rent in advance. In one region in Belgium the deposit was raised to four months' rent. These large upfront costs are completely inaccessible to people experiencing poverty and many are forced to get into debt just to afford a deposit. Similarly, the down-payments required to take out a mortgage mean that homeownership is largely out of reach for people experiencing poverty. For people who do manage get a mortgage it is often a struggle to pay it back. As expressed by one participant with experience of poverty, "You spend your life paying loans. You have no life. You live to pay loans."



Those who are unable to keep up with the dramatic increases in housing costs may live with a persistent threat of eviction and homelessness. Across workshops, participants felt that evictions were not sufficiently regulated. A person with experience of poverty from Serbia shared that it is very easy to evict someone from their home if they miss three months' rent. People also reported that where rent controls are in place, landlords may end a tenant's lease solely for the purpose of releasing the accommodation and increasing rent. A woman from Brussels shared that a landlord evicted an entire building of tenants by claiming that he needed to do renovations when in reality he was putting the units back on the market at a higher price. Participants highlighted that huge profits are being made by landlords through the increasing cost of housing.



Social housing and emergency accommodation

In both workshops people experiencing poverty felt that there was not adequate state provision of housing. Social housing is often not affordable to everyone, while complex administrative procedures and poor outreach further limit accessibility. There is also not enough social housing, which leads to long waiting lists. It was reported that in the Netherlands people face a waiting period of up to ten years. It was felt that construction of private accommodation is prioritised over building adequate social housing. This issue is further exacerbated by the privatisation of social housing that is taking place in some countries. People also expressed concern over the quality of public housing. For instance, a person with experience of poverty from Hungary explained that social housing is only available in Budapest, but that “the quality is horrible, you cannot live there.” Furthermore, social housing neighbourhoods are often under resourced and



stigmatized, contributing to the segregation of people experiencing poverty from the broader community.

Delegates from multiple countries reported positive experiences with the housing first programme, which provides people who have experienced long term homelessness with access to a house as soon as possible. However, participants reported that there were often limitations to how this was implemented in practice. In Austria there are long waiting lists and a lot of administrative work to be completed in order to apply. A person with experience of poverty from Austria said that you have to follow up and draw attention to your case during that waiting period and that once you are provided with an apartment it is often in very poor condition. Participants from Slovakia highlighted that their housing first project only offers accommodation for two years. People experiencing poverty may be left with nowhere to go when this period ends. In Portugal, the housing first programme requires people to cohabit, which is not suitable for everyone and can lead to overcrowded conditions and a lack of privacy.

Moreover, many countries do not have a housing first policy and homeless people often spend long periods of time in emergency accommodation and homeless shelters. Across Europe, there is a trend of governments outsourcing the provision of homeless accommodation to private companies, often with very lucrative contracts. Despite the profits made, private shelters tend to have inadequate and overcrowded conditions that keep people trapped in the poverty cycle. Homeless people are also sometimes subject to mistreatment and abuse in these facilities.

Marginalized Groups

In both workshops, people with experience of poverty highlighted that certain groups are disproportionately impacted by housing costs. People discussed that refugees are only provided with accommodation while their application is being processed and that once this is complete, they must find their own housing. A lack of resources and support means that the vast majority of refugees are not able to secure accommodation and many fall into homelessness. Discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities is also a major issue in the housing market. As shared by a person with experience of poverty from Greece,

“if you call for a house, and say that you are black, they don’t want to rent to you. The problem is that there is no authority where you can report this kind of discrimination.”

Participant from Greece



It was also noted that a lack of affordable housing can take a particular toll on women. A person with experience of poverty from Austria, highlighted that accommodation for homeless people is usually not targeted towards women. She explained that women experiencing poverty are sometimes forced to enter or remain in abusive relationships as it is the only way to access housing. When renting alone is entirely out of reach, people become dependent on those they cohabit with, including in situations of violence. Participants also believed that the strain caused by housing costs was contributing to an increase in instances of domestic violence.

Furthermore, people with disabilities face unique barriers to accessing housing. A woman with experience of poverty from the Netherlands shared that although she was living in social housing, the accommodation was not fit to support her needs as a wheelchair user. It was also noted that people with disabilities face particularly long waiting lists to access appropriate social housing. One participant shared that where there is no appropriate accommodation available, people with disabilities often continue living with their parents, even into their 30's and 40's. These people are left in a precarious situation when their parents pass away and may enter homelessness.

Lastly, participants from both workshops highlighted that young people are hugely limited by the cost of housing. A person with experience of poverty from Slovakia shared that when young people finish school, they cannot start a life, live with their partner or have children, because they cannot afford to leave home. It was highlighted that in the Netherlands, young people are living with their parents into their mid-30's because they risk becoming homeless if they move out. This



situation means that young people have very little autonomy over their lives and puts a strain on familial relationships. Young people who leave state care are particularly vulnerable as they usually lose all supports when they turn 18. Many care leavers are unable to find accommodation at this point and do not have family to fall back on.

Solutions

Participants felt that in order to tackle the crisis of unaffordable accommodation, there needs to be an increase in public power over the housing market. As more and more properties are owned by fewer people, it is crucial that private actors are not given free rein to dictate housing costs and conditions. States cannot continue to outsource their responsibilities to the market and must ensure that people experiencing poverty have access to affordable, quality housing.

Market Intervention and Regulation

People in both workshops felt that to address housing issues and combat poverty broadly, incomes need to be raised. Governments should therefore ensure that minimum wage, minimum income, pensions and all other forms of social welfare are indexed to match the cost of living. At the same time, laws should be put in place to limit the amount rents can be increased within a certain timeframe and to impose a maximum rent price. Governments should also ensure that rent deposits do not act as a barrier to securing accommodation. Combined, these measures can increase the affordability of housing while also ensuring people have sufficient disposable income to meet their other needs.

The state must also intervene in the market to ensure that people have access to decent, quality housing. Governments should implement minimum standards for both private and social housing and take steps to ensure these are complied with. In particular, higher standards should be implemented in accommodation for asylum seekers and homeless people. People should always have access to their own room, with a door they can lock, and have the choice to cook for themselves. The dignity and privacy of residents should always be respected, also by staff of accommodation facilities. Lastly, with regards to both costs and conditions, all citizens should be empowered to understand their legal rights.

Housing as a Human Right

In both workshops people experiencing poverty felt that housing should be treated as a human right and not as a commodity. Therefore, as well as replacing the private sector, states need to reclaim public power over housing. First and foremost, this means increased supply and quality of social housing. Participants highlighted that everyone should be guaranteed decent housing regardless of their income or employment status. Moreover, access to social housing should not be accompanied by punitive welfare policies that keep people trapped in the cycle of poverty.



People also highlighted the need for an EU Directive on the right to housing that is translated into national legislation. While states must take responsibility for ensuring access to housing for all, citizens and civil society should be meaningfully included in this process. In particular, the expertise of people experiencing poverty must be valued and incorporated into housing policies.



Key Messages from Workshop 6

- We are having very high rents in comparison with social benefits/wages that are indexed less or not at all. One of the attendees had her rent indexed over 50% in just 4 years. Many of us are spending over 70% of our income in rent. This means that after paying rent, we have no money left for other expenses, such as food, savings, study, loans (e.g. study and mortgage loans), leisure/cultural activities, medical expenses, etc. As a result, many of us are experiencing more mental health problems, including stress, anxiety and depression.
- Overcrowded and inadequate accommodation, alongside soaring housing costs, cause immense stress within households. These factors can put a strain on family relationships and contribute to a rise in divorces. The pressure caused by poor housing conditions can also exacerbate situations of domestic abuse, while a lack of affordable accommodation can make it more difficult for victims to leave their abusers.
- In most Member States, governments are providing private actors with grants for them to offer shelter/accommodation solutions to homeless people. Private actors are taking advantage of this and are charging individuals very high prices and making profit. On top of this, the accommodation often has inadequate or overcrowded conditions. All in all, this is maintaining individuals in poverty. Social benefits and other kinds of support should lift people out of poverty, rather than maintaining them in the poverty bubble/trap.

Key Messages from Workshop 7

- Housing is a human right and it is made way too expensive; too many people are simply deprived of this human right.
- There should be more social housing of better quality including in rural areas and stigma and discrimination for people who use them should be combatted (Refugees, racialised minorities and other vulnerable groups, women,...).
- Increase income levels of PeP and reduce housing costs, supporting children and young people in particular who are our last hope for the future.
- Bridge the gap between policy making and grassroot realities by supporting the close involvement of PeP (and their civil society organisations) in the decisions that affect them.



IV. CLOSING PLENARY: RESPONSE FROM POLICYMAKERS AND NEXT STEPS

At the closing plenary, facilitated by **the late Fintan Farrell, former Director of EAPN and project manager of EMIN**, people experiencing poverty presented the key messages formulated in all seven workshops that have been included above at the end of each section. After the presentations, policymakers responded to the messages shared.

First to respond was **Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights**. He opened by highlighting the importance of people experiencing poverty participating in core decision-making. He outlined three benefits of participatory practices. Firstly, it allows the experiential knowledge of people experiencing poverty to improve policies. For instance, when he reported on take-up of social welfare supports, he found that people were not reached by benefits due to stigma and a lack of information. However, he noted that this issue can only be understood by including people experiencing poverty. He said that decision makers have not considered these voices in their response to the energy crisis and as a result policies have major blind spots. For example, National Recovery and Resilience Plans include supports for home renovations, but these schemes are not accessible to low-income people. Next, he explained how participation of people experiencing poverty can shine a light on the hidden dimensions of poverty. He explained that discrimination, for example, is part of everyday life for people experiencing poverty but that this issue is rarely taken into account when designing policies. Lastly, he recognised how people experiencing poverty are marginalised in political decision making and argued that a participative approach can help to rebalance that power. However, he recognised that in order to be effective, participation must be prioritised from the very beginning, at the point of policy design. Moreover, the process of participation must not perpetuate further stigma or judgment.

Next up was **Isabelle Schömann, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation**. She was asked about the power of mobilization and how people experiencing poverty can be a part of this. She opened by thanking the delegates for sharing their experiences and promised to relay what was said among the ETUC network. She highlighted positive legislative changes that are helping to protect vulnerable people, including the EU directive on minimum wage. The ETUC will support trade unions at national level to set a minimum wage that is adapted to the needs of workers while promoting collective bargaining. Although Member States have two years to transpose the directive, she argued that they should take the eradication of poverty seriously and act now. She also spoke on the energy crisis, highlighting how it is deepening inequality and placing a disproportionate burden on people experiencing poverty. She noted that the cost of living crisis was coming before the war in Ukraine. We need to stand in solidarity, she said, and rebalance power within companies away from those who put profits first. In particular, she highlighted the challenges of in-work poverty and precarious employment arrangements, including fake self-employment and underpaying of young workers.



Gabriele Bischoff, Member of the European Parliament in the S&D group, spoke next. She was asked what she is doing at the European Parliament to tackle poverty, including in-work poverty. She explained that at the European Economic and Social Committee she has been working on minimum wage. She highlighted that she is pushing for a Directive on minimum income as well as minimum wage. She went on to discuss how successive crises have caused the rich to get richer and poor to get poorer. Poverty is a failure of the system and not of individuals, she said. While there were goals on poverty in place, they have largely failed. Poverty is trickling up and this shows that the market is not working. She said that the arguments for non-intervention in the market are simply false. In line with this she spoke on the S&D's campaign to "bring the bills down", which strives to reduce energy prices for both companies and households and ensure everyone has access to affordable energy.

She also highlighted that a ban on disconnections has always been a key demand and that this needs to be implemented in all countries across Europe. Moreover, both minimum income schemes and minimum wages need to be raised faster and further to keep up with the rise in costs. Action must be taken to ensure that everyone has an income above the poverty line.

The last speaker of the closing plenary was **Maija Celmina, member of the cabinet of the Vice President of the European Commission, Nicolas Schmit**. She argued that the Commission is pushing towards a social market economy, noting the directive on minimum wage and the council recommendation on minimum income as important steps. She also shared the hope that the G7 will deliver on an energy price cap. She then discussed the importance of National Recovery and Resilience Plans and highlighted that people experiencing poverty should be consulted during their development. She acknowledged that most countries are only just now implementing their plans and that they are often not well targeted. To ensure that the measures taken are effective,



an alliance is needed between the European Parliament, social partners and people experiencing poverty. To close she conveyed a message from the Vice-President that the concerns of people experiencing poverty need to be heard and acted upon. Though some may not recognise the extent of the hardship faced, she said, these issues must be addressed. When effective solutions are not found, people lose their faith in the European Commission and in politics broadly.

There was then a discussion with the audience on what had been said by the speakers. Sandra from Germany highlighted that we must connect across nations to ensure that the words spoken are turned into action. A woman from Ireland noted that people have been

experiencing poverty since before the war or the pandemic and that these crises should not distract from addressing the systemic causes of poverty. Lastly, a woman from France highlighted that all people are born equal but that society divides us into rich and poor. Everyone has the capacity to climb out of poverty if they are given the chance, she said. The speakers promised to bring these messages with them into their work.

Quinta Ansem, the chairperson of EAPN Netherlands, closed the session and the event as a whole. She highlighted that people have to count on guaranteed subsistence for a roof over their head, energy for daily necessities and income for basic needs. The time for trusting the market mechanism is over, she said. The free market only benefits the few and allows big companies to profit off the backs of vulnerable people. This needs to end, she said. We need a humane system that works for all people and the planet. She argued for a governing system based on the good for all and not political divisions. Quinta then presented a symbolic gift to policy-makers on behalf of EAPN Netherlands: a sack of blocks to build a decent life and safe stable home for all. The different colours represent the different policies needed to achieve this; blue for health services, green for adequate income, red for affordable energy and yellow for government support. “Take this with



you for the courage to secure adequate supports for those in need. Embark on a new path and abandon the old treacherous one”, she said.

“Accept also the gifts of experience and knowledge from people experiencing poverty.”

Quinta Ansem, Chairperson of EAPN Netherlands



V. FINAL KEY MESSAGES FROM THE PEP MEETING 2022

Key Messages on Housing

Increase incomes and reduce costs

- Both wages and benefits are failing to keep up with rising housing costs.
- Many people experiencing poverty are spending up to 70% of their incomes on housing.
- The high cost of rent means that people experiencing poverty have little money left over for other expenses such as food, energy bills, education, leisure, or savings.
- Unmanageable costs are leading to mental health problems such as stress, anxiety and depression. Costs also put a strain on family relationships and create tension within the home.
- Incomes must be adequately indexed to ensure access to affordable accommodation.

Treat housing as a Human Right!

- Housing is a basic human right and too many people are deprived of this right due to costs. The government must ensure that everyone has an affordable and decent place to live.
- Accommodation for people experiencing homelessness is often privatised. Private shelters are expensive for the state however often have inadequate and overcrowded conditions. Poor living conditions keep homeless people trapped in the cycle of poverty.
- Housing supports and social benefits should lift people out of poverty, instead of keeping them stuck in precarity.
- The state must build more social housing of higher quality to ensure affordable access for all. Young people in particular must be supported to secure housing.
- Action must be taken to combat discrimination and stigma against those who live in social housing, particularly minority groups.
- Governments must bridge the gap between policy making and grassroots realities by supporting the close involvement of people experiencing poverty (and their civil society organisations) in the decisions that affect them.



Secure access to food

- Social benefits must include food security. Everyone should have access to a decent minimum income that will enable them to buy their own food.
- Introduce a price cap on essential foods and abolish taxes for basic items.
- Provide children with three healthy meals a day.
- Provide everyone with access to clean drinking water for free.

Regulate the market

- Companies are profiting from the increase in prices. We need to make companies accountable.
- The government should redistribute the profits of private companies through progressive taxation.
- There needs to be transparency regarding how prices are set.
- The power of companies to increase prices should have limits, particularly in times of crisis.
- Governments must fight the volatility of prices and stabilise the market.

Sustainability and Local Solidarity

- Invest in sustainability measures, including access to information on sustainability.
- Tackle food waste by ensuring that quality food is redistributed in a dignified manner.
- Counter dependence on global supply chains and support local producers and farmers.
- Make social solidarity effective.
- Ensure the participation of people experiencing poverty in decision-making around local food systems.
- Ensure that all people have access to adequate income that allows them to live a life of dignity and be included in broader society.



Ensure affordable access to energy for all

- Prices must be stabilised so that everyone has secure access to energy.
- Introduce a price ceiling and reduce VAT on energy to avoid excessive increases in costs.
- Essential energy use should be distinguished from luxury use for the purposes of pricing and taxation.
- Reduce costs for those facing energy poverty, including through a social tariff.
- Index pensions and benefits and revise the minimum wage upwards annually.
- Introduce targeted and adequate benefits for groups at risk of energy poverty. Ensure that vulnerable households receive funds, information, and support.
- Introduce an outright ban on disconnections and guarantee continued supply without debt accrument.
- Ensure that those unable to pay their energy bills are not subject to legal proceedings.
- Access to energy must be protected all year around as energy poverty is not only a problem in winter.

Stop treating energy as a commodity

- There is enough energy for all if we share it equitably.
- We must have public control over energy prices and provisions.
- We need to change from a profit-oriented model to a rights-based approach.
- The state should redistribute income from the energy market through progressive taxation. Reduce taxes on labour and increase taxes on profit.
- There needs to be more public-citizen co-creation of policies. End users, including people experiencing poverty, should have a place on decision-making bodies.
- Community owned energy supplies should be supported to promote the agency of citizens.

Fair transition to a new energy system

- We need to have both social justice and climate justice.
- Everyone must have affordable access to clean energy.
- The state should introduce adequate standards for insulation in social housing and rented accommodation.
- Home renovations to increase energy efficiency should be publicly funded.
- Governments should invest in and legislate on proven efficient heating and cooling systems. The technologies exist.
- States should develop infrastructure to diversify energy supply across the whole of Europe, in a solidarity approach.



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