



**European Economic
and Social Committee**
Civil Society Organisations' Group

*Launch of the EU 2024 EAPN Poverty Watch Report:
"Towards a systemic approach to social protection"*
8 April 2025

**Inaugural speech by Séamus Boland
President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group of the EESC**

Esteemed speakers, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I would like to welcome you to the European Economic and Social Committee, for this **joint event** with the European Anti-Poverty Network;
This collaboration is becoming a **regular occurrence**, as we hosted the EAPN last year for the launch of the 2023 annual report.

Dear Kahina, you are very welcome here – as you know, combatting poverty has been the **overarching priority** of the Civil Society Organisations' Group over the last four years;
And poverty eradication is a topic which is very close to my heart, for both **personal** and **professional reasons**.

I read through the EAPN report and for the country that I know the best, Ireland, I can only **concur** with the descriptions;
It saddens me greatly, to read that Ireland has the **highest rates of female homelessness in the EU...**

Regrettably, the figures we read in this years' EAPN report are well known: **94.6 million people**, the equivalent of **21.4%** of the European population, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023. As many times as I read those figures, I am still astonished. How is it possible that in a Union of such wealth, **1/5** of the European population lives in such distress?

And for **children** living in the EU, the figures are even worse: **24.8%** face poverty or social exclusion in their daily lives;

Part of the answer is of course that we are facing **multi-dimensional** and **inter-connected crises** within Europe. Environmental, energy, demography, housing, economic, wars... we have all heard it before. But the reality is that current **social policies are simply not able to meet the challenges ahead!**

One cannot but ask: if this is the situation in the EU, with our generous social protection systems, then **how much poverty is there elsewhere?**

It is precisely for these reasons, that we must have **more coordination** and **linkages** between actions at the **local, national** and **European levels**;

Like you, I am very much looking forward to the **first EU anti-poverty strategy** and later this morning you will hear from my colleague and Group Vice-President, **Krzysztof Balon**, who is the EESC rapporteur on the forthcoming strategy.

What is evident from this years' EAPN report, is that it is **imperative** to have much **more coherence and complementarity between EU social policies**, perhaps even an **EU poverty check** on all EU policies. We also need to better understand the **linkages** and **inter-sectionalities** between different groups of people who face poverty;

For example, between women, persons with disabilities and minority groups;

Consequently, I **fully agree** with the recommendation in this years' EAPN report, which calls for "*...full coherence (of the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights) with the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, the European Affordable Housing Plan, the Affordable Energy Plan and other EU policies beyond social affairs*".

But we should be going even further;

Yes, poverty eradication requires **political willingness**;

It is a **political choice** – and it is **urgent**;

Each time that I walk past the **homeless people** living on **Place Luxembourg**, right next to the European Parliament, the contrast in **symbolism** between the values of our European Union and the realities of poverty within the EU – well, it is simply shocking.

Ultimately, the eradication of poverty requires **unrelenting action by all Member States**;

Much of the poverty experienced in the EU is **intergenerational** and it can be particularly harsh on the lives of children and older people. In the areas of **education, housing** and **high-cost energy**, special measures - that target the weaknesses of the system - must be introduced;

Otherwise, the **EU as a political entity** will struggle to retain the confidence of its **citizens**.

This brings me to my last point, which is touched upon in your **recommendation** which calls for "Support to civil society organisations by securing funding and protecting them from public attacks";

This dimension, that of an **enabling** and **structured** environment for **meaningful civil dialogue** and **participation**, is at the very core of our work as the Civil Society Organisations Group; Just last week at our plenary, we reminded **Commissioner McGrath** that civil society is the glue, or the *oil in the engine of our societies*;

Civil society organisations act daily as local safety nets. At the same time, **they are pivotal partners in defending democracy and fundamental rights** within the EU;

In this context, we as a Group, have been very vocal in calling for and now supporting an **EU Civil Society Strategy** and the creation of a *Civil Society Platform*;

Building a strong European Civil Society Strategy and reinforcing support and **funding for CSOs** were also among the key recommendations of this years' **Civil Society Week** at the EESC;

As were also the necessity to **strengthen financial support** for CSOs in the CERV programme and the European Social Fund Plus, in the upcoming **MPF**.

I could go on for a much longer time, but I will close with these remarks and I wish you all very fruitful discussions.

Thank you for your attention.